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The Political Agenda of the International Trade Union Movement



Discussions from the GLI International Summer School

9-13 July 2012, Northern College, UK

Edited by Celia Mather



Geneva - Manchester - New York

The 2012 GLI Summer School was supported by the International Union of Foodworkers, International Transportworkers Federation, Building & Woodworkers' International, Unite, RMT, and Unia (Switzerland)



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Foreword

The first GLI International Summer School at Northern College successfully concluded in July 2012 after a week of intense debate and discussion on what are, and what should be, the politics of the international trade union movement. There were 84 participants from 26 countries, with delegations from four Global Union Federations and numerous national unions.

Many of us have organised or participated in trade union education programmes about globalisation, organising in transnational corporations, and building strong global union federations. Inevitably, when analysing the expansion of global corporations, neo-liberal government policies, subsequent economic crises and the impact on working people and unions, the essential questions emerge: What is the political alternative? Where is the political response of our international trade union institutions? What's *our* vision for a socially-just and environmentally sustainable global economy?

We needed a space where we could talk about trade union politics on an international scale, whether we're experienced activists in the international movement, or learning how to become so in the future. We needed to provide opportunities for young activists to meet and debate politics with their counterparts in other countries, forming international networks of solidarity for the years to come.

This was the origin of the International Summer School. Indeed, the idea for an International Summer School lay at the core of the foundation of the Global Labour Institute in Geneva in 1997, and the subsequent establishment of GLIs in New York and Manchester.

It was only in 2012 that we were able to turn this idea into reality, with the support of Northern College and trade unions keen to engage in discussion on the politics of the international trade union movement.

Why Northern College?

Northern College works in close partnership with GLI. It is a residential college in the UK set up in 1978 for working class adults who have not previously benefited from good education. It enjoys strong support from the British union movement for whom it also hosts education programmes. <http://www.northern.ac.uk/>.



The College is located at Wentworth Castle, a magnificent mansion from the early 18th century set in beautiful grounds and the countryside of South Yorkshire, a region with great historical significance, famous for its coal mines. South Yorkshire was once a stronghold of the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM), until the early 1980s when the Conservative government under Margaret Thatcher fought to break union power and closed many of the mines.

Northern College, its staff and the surrounding community, steeped in trade union culture and history, provided an ideal supportive home for an international trade union summer school (even when it's raining...).

Who was there?

The response to the idea of an international summer school far exceeded our expectations. Eventually eighty-nine participants from twenty-six countries gathered at Northern College in northern England, with twenty-eight unions and global union federations

represented. Others were unable to come because of visa restrictions or urgent demands of industrial disputes. Many others were disappointed when we reached the capacity limits of college accommodation.

While not attempting to make international school participation 'representative' of the world's trade union movement we did want to ensure that there was considerable diversity of participants. In the end there were participants from all continents, and the participants were generally delighted and surprised by the range of countries represented.

We of course wanted to achieve gender parity. In the final analysis, thirty-two women and fifty-seven men participated, a ratio that has to be improved in the future.

We also wanted to get a good mixture of older, more experienced or 'professional' international trade unionists, and younger activists, for whom an international discussion is a relatively new experience. Roughly one-third of participants had never attended an international trade union event before.

Nevertheless, we inevitably faced major constraints of finance, language and worsening UK immigration and visa controls, which precluded many people we would have wanted to be present. The entire event was in English. This of course excluded many people from participating, but simultaneous interpretation would have been prohibitively expensive, and – more importantly – made it very difficult to maintain the essential participatory style and informality of the event. We hope to redress this by organising or supporting future summer schools in other languages.

Dave Spooner, GLI (UK)

Who made it happen?

We are extremely grateful to everyone for helping to make it happen: the unions that provided encouragement and essential financial resources, the Northern College staff who hosted us, and the numerous volunteers who organised and supported the event.

- Most importantly, **Annie Hopley**, the event organiser who worked voluntarily over many weeks to make it all happen, with **Joe Holly**.
- The GLI Report Team: by a great team of young labour movement activists: **Romain Felli**, **Lucy Hopley**, **Josiah Mortimer**, **Frederick Pitts** and **Sean Sayer** – under the guidance of **Celia Mather**, who then edited this report¹
- **Unite the Union** (UK), and in particular **Jim Mowatt**, Director of Education
- **National Union of Rail Maritime and Transport Workers** (UK), and in particular **Andy Gilchrist**, Education Officer
- **Unia** (Switzerland), and in particular **Vasco Pedrina** and **Corinne Scharer**
- **Building & Woodworkers International**
- **International Union of Foodworkers**
- **International Transportworkers' Federation**

¹ See Josiah Mortimer: 'A week as a rapporteur for the global labour movement': <http://www.theyorker.co.uk/comment/blogs/summerblogs%20/12024>

- **Peter Newn** and the **Unite shop stewards at Manchester Airport** for their fantastic 'meet and greet' of participants
- **John Bell, Jane Hawley, Steve Jones, George Pope, Sarah Taylor** and the rest of the trade union tutors and staff at **Northern College**
- The '**transport team**' - **Elaine Morrison, Del Mythen, Mary Sayer**
- **Tomas Niederlag** for the photography
- **Walton Pantland** from **Union Solidarity International** for the web presence
- and the many presenters and workshop facilitators who made the school such a success.



The Big Picture

How Did We Arrive Here?

100 years of democratic socialism in the trade union movement and now, this.....

In 1997, **Dan Gallin** founded the Global Labour Institute in Geneva. In the founding statement was a commitment to organise a Summer School as soon as resources were available. Fifteen years later, as this aspiration finally became a reality, Gallin identifies a dual crisis afflicting the labour movement. On the one hand, there is a crisis of trade unionism. On the other, there is a crisis of socialism. The connections between these two crises must be untangled and explored, he said.

Unlike some commentators, Gallin does not believe that the “*violent onslaught of corporate power and conservative governments*” is the sole cause for the crisis of trade unionism. Although these factors are very real, the problem is also the ‘passivity’ of trade unions in the face of this onslaught.

This passivity has its roots in the Second World War. Organised labour had provided a valuable ally to national war efforts in Europe and the USA. Once the war ended, unions continued to work with governments, becoming reliant upon the state as the vehicle of change. The vision of a new society which had characterised pre-war trade unionism was lost. According to Gallin, these developments undermined the labour movement’s ‘capacity to act as an effective force’ for social transformation.

Gallin identified the political and intellectual ‘disarmament’ of unions over this period. The 1970s and the following two decades



saw massive changes in capitalist working practices. However, the labour movement was ‘asleep’, union leaderships were “*bereft of political imagination*”, administering the gains of past struggles rather than engaging with the struggles of the future.

The growing service sector was largely unorganised, populated by a new “*invisible working class*” of which women constituted a significant portion. Millions of workers in China, India and in the former Soviet bloc, for the most part unorganised, had joined the global labour pool. Labour’s failure to adapt to this new terrain of struggle results in the situation we find ourselves in today, whereby “*organised labour no longer represents a statistically significant portion of the global labour market*”. Herein lays one major reason for the crisis of trade unionism.

As Gallin detailed, the roots of this crisis can be found in the failure of unions to adapt their worldview to the new conditions of capitalism. This intellectual poverty is the thread which links the two components of the dual crisis of the labour movement, connecting the crisis of trade unionism with the crisis of socialism.

Before the Second World War, most of the labour movement had a common narrative, which was socialist and broadly Marxist. After the war, however, socialist parties “*abandoned their identities as class parties of labour*” and their “*sense of urgency for social transformation*”. The Cold War only compounded matters. Socialism was associated with Stalinism, and Stalinism was associated with socialism. The trade union purges of radical elements in the USA opened the way for “*collusion with the American Government*”.

Gallin was an independent socialist at the time, an experience that he describes as far from easy. For him, “*the principal casualty of that period with the most fateful consequences was the end of social democracy’s role as the bearer of the socialist heritage*”. The move away from socialism began with the Social Democratic party in Germany, eventually ending with New Labour and the Third Way of Blair, Schroeder and Clinton.

The social democratic party machinery was channelled into an ‘opportunistic’ scheme of capturing the votes of unaligned conservatives, shifting the terms of political debate. As an illustration, Gallin quoted Margaret Thatcher, who claimed that her greatest achievement was Tony Blair.

Social democratic parties embraced neo-liberal ideas. In the process, they lost their credibility and assumed an increasingly technocratic role. When Western unions tried to assist the unions that had survived in the former Soviet block, “*without common ideological foundations, and without a common narrative, all they could was provide technical advice*”. Social democracy’s historic enemy on the Left – Stalinism - had collapsed, just when social democracy chose to vacate the territory of socialism entirely.

Today, attacks on welfare state and austerity measures are losing social democratic parties elections across Europe except in France, where voters elected a socialist government hoping it would resist the neo-liberal programme. A gap has been widening between the trade union movements and social democratic parties. According to Gallin, to solve the crisis of socialism, the labour movement must recover a lost political dimension.

The dual crisis of the labour movement centres around a set of issues simultaneously ideological, political and organisational. Gallin warns the movement not to believe that the big answers and actions are right around the corner, but offers a series of recommendations as to how we might begin to address the dual crisis:

- ‘Informed by experience’, the labour movement must state that socialism must necessarily entail radical democracy. This requires a return to our heritage, also exploring the dissident elements within the labour movement who have challenged anti-democratic tendencies.
- The identity of the working class must be re-established. The Occupy protestors were right in saying that we are the 99%. In

order to reach this 99%, unions must move beyond their comfort zone, embracing new and untouched areas of the global workforce.

- Gallin observes that global unions do not yet exist in any real sense. The linking up of struggles across borders is essential. We must look beyond the national to the international and be careful that any concessions we make, do not undermine other members of the global working class.
- Women represent a huge proportion of the organised working class with courage and potential that lay untapped. Much of the labour movement still doesn't get it where women are concerned. Gallin suggests that what is required is *"the feminisation of the trade unions"*.

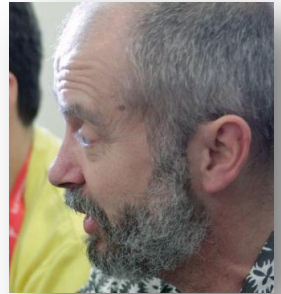
Gallin ended with the most important recommendation of all: *"Let's go out and work and fight with courage and passion"*, adding that at the end of this inaugural GLI summer school, the question on our lips must be *"What are you now going to do that you would not have done if you hadn't been here?"*

"If not us, who? If not here, where? If not now, when?"

“What do we organise for?”

“Who are we? Where are we now? Where do we want to go? What do we organise for?” asked **Peter Hall-Jones** from New Zealand, Communications Manager for the global ‘New Unionism Network’.

For Hall-Jones, the politics of the international trade union movement often rely on false assumptions, which lead us to asking false questions. And, as the American novelist Thomas Pynchon wrote, *“If you can get people to ask the wrong questions, you don’t have to worry about the answers they come up with”*. So we need to dispel some commonly held myths. We need to paint a more accurate picture of the state of trade unionism across the world.



In the industrialised world, many trade union conferences discuss the decline of union membership. Against this decline, they often advocate ‘organising’ campaigns, in order to recruit new members and keep the existing ones. However, if we consider the question internationally, we get a different picture. Since 2000, union membership has grown in many more countries than it has declined. We often assume that trade unions in poor countries experience the same pattern of development as in the rich one. It is not the case. Unions in most rich countries have managed to slow or arrest their decline. Unions in most poor countries are growing. Indeed, the growth in poorer countries more than compensates the decline in richer countries.

The last extensive study of trade union membership over the world was published by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) in 1997. For various reasons, this has not been updated. The New Unionism Network began collecting data in 2004 and was surprised to find that the dominant narrative of union decline is heavily-conditioned by the media in Northern countries.

That said, one needs to use these numbers with great caution. Raw numbers do not give an account of the actual influence of trade unions. However, they do indicate a trend which goes against the grain of the ‘decline’ myth. The real question, therefore, is not “*How do we stop decline?*”, but rather “*What do we organise for?*” It is about politics, not business management.

How do we know what trade union members really want? The model known as ‘business unionism’ makes the assumption that members join a trade union solely in order to obtain pay increases and better working conditions. Peter believes the data shows that this is a myth as well. In fact, most people pay union membership fees even if the work of the union provides benefits to other workers who have less favourable conditions than themselves.

It is a pity that so few unions make any effort to objectively assessing what kind of world their members actually want. Fortunately, academics and others have done such research. From this, it appears that ‘solidarity’ and ‘equality’ are the values most cherished by union members over the world. Considering that more than three quarters of the global workforce live in circumstances of ‘economic insecurity’ (according to the ILO), this desire for solidarity and equality is not so surprising. The data directs us towards a new shift in unionism.

These are the ‘wrong’ questions, which Peter believes we should stop asking:

- How do we stop union decline?
- How do we win pay increases, in the face of members’ passivity?
- How do we get young people to see us as relevant?

Ultimately, the ‘right’ questions need to be determined by members. But from what he has seen of the research, Peter suggests the following:

- What political goals do workers want us to organise towards?
- In pursuit of these, how do we start to reorganise the workplace – locally and across borders?

- How do we bring different types of worker into the union movement, in leadership as well as membership?

‘The Fall & Rise of Labour?’

Three discussion groups looked at the future of the global trade union movement and new trends in trade unionism, covering themes such as organising strategies, the nature of union politics, and links with mainstream labour parties.

Breaking with ‘labour’ parties

This discussion was facilitated by Lara Skinner from the GLI at Cornell University, USA. Responses to the financial crisis have led to a shift in the relationship between unions and social democratic parties. Partnerships with parties that have implemented or supported austerity policies since the crash are now under great strain.

“Members are looking for unions to stand up for their own interests’ and for labour parties to actually stand for something”, said Sam Goldsmith from the Rail, Maritime and Transport workers’ Union (UK). His union is one of the only overtly socialist trade unions in Britain.

Justina Jonas, a Namibian trade unionist and Building & Woodworkers’ International (BWI) delegate, spoke of the situation with her union confederation in Namibia. *“There is a new debate in terms of our affiliation with the ruling party”* over fears about a lack of political independence for the unions. Party ties *“aren’t working for the working class in Namibia - if a minister wants to shut a union official up, they are made into a Deputy Minister”*, she said.

In the light of such tensions, unions are looking more and more to social movements. In Britain, unions such as the Public and Commercial Services Union (PCS) are turning more to protest groups such as UK Uncut, an anti-tax-avoidance collective, rather than to the Labour Party.

It is not that the global union movement must be apolitical. Instead, *“we need a political agenda that matches the workplace agenda”*, said another participant. The link between politics and trade unionism is clear. *“If you are an active trade unionist, you will often become a socialist too”*.

Since the debate about ties with social democratic parties has intensified, questions about how to keep these parties accountable, and whether or not to break links with them altogether, have become central. Yet unions under attack must be more involved in politics than ever – on pay, conditions, pensions and the right to organise.

In fighting these attacks, unions become stronger. When trade unions *“reflect the outrage and anger that’s out there...they appeal fundamentally more to workers”*, reflected Ron Oswald, who is General Secretary of the Global Union Federation for food and allied workers, the IUF. While there is still a serious lack of secure employment, unions must not revert to what Oswald calls ‘business as usual’. Major efforts must be made to challenge and organise precarious work. Global Unions must be at the forefront of *“the fight against the destruction of organised work”*, he said.

Can unions sustain the increasingly tense links between themselves and established social democratic parties? It is a key question, whether in Namibia, where trade unions’ independence is compromised by ruling party links, or in Europe where social democratic parties have supported and implemented austerity. If these links can’t be sustained, Lara Skinner said, unions may explore *“the possibility of creating new parties - new socialist parties”*.

“We need an attack plan! Now!”

Participants in the discussion group led by Peter Hall-Jones shared their views and experiences on the three questions he had set out:

- Where, as trade unions, are we?
- Where do we want to be?
- How do we go from here to there?

Unemployment is the one of the main challenges for organising workers. How do we organise people if they are out of work? One participant, from Norway, said that in her country unemployment is not a key issue; trade union members are more interested in discussing pay and conditions. For most other participants, however, unemployment is on the rise, and more precarious employment conditions the norm. According to a participant from India, the issue in her country is more one of *under*-employment: people don't get sustainable jobs. The multinational companies investing in India do not create stable jobs. Rather they use contract labour and outsourcing. The real trouble is that trade unions tend to not recognise these informal workers as workers and to not organise them. The challenge for trade unions is one of inclusiveness: who is representing all workers?

An activist from the PCS union (UK) argued that privatisation increases precarious work and flexibility. Trade unions often fight after the process has taken place rather than before: we should be more proactive. For another British trade unionist, from Unite, the bosses want us to believe that no jobs are for life any more and we should just accept flexibility and 'precarisation'. This creates a great deal of insecurity among workers, both employed and unemployed. To meet this challenge of rising unemployment, his trade union now has a scheme of recruiting members in communities. Its goal is to build a spirit of social justice. There was a general feeling, however, that trade unions are not sufficiently interested in such things. For instance, little work seems to be done with agency workers.

According to Hall-Jones, research shows that workers do want their unions to be more proactive on issues beyond just pay and conditions. Elizabeth Tang from the Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions agreed: the members of her confederation are incredibly active in democracy struggles. She even found that it was easier to mobilise members on issues of rights and democracy than for a pay rise. She was joined on this point by an organiser from the National Domestic Workers Alliance (USA) whose union organises migrant women workers. Beyond labour issues, these members are becoming leaders in women's movements, as well as in migrants'

movements. They take part in many progressive causes such as the opposition to the war, or the Occupy movement.

A colleague from Norway said that our struggles are like a pyramid whose basis is democracy. Reflecting on the very dire conditions worldwide facing trade unions, she said, *“We need an attack plan! Now!”* Another said there should not be such as thing as ‘passive’ union members: *“Nothing happens until you do something yourself”*.

Hall-Jones is interested in finding out how trade unions around the world do actually determine what their members want. Some unions do surveys of their members. One union in Hong Kong organised very extensive interviews with migrant domestic workers there to understand better their conditions and desires. Unite, in the UK, uses text messages to make quick polls of their members. This is not just about getting information from workers; it also helps to build a collective spirit.

Finally, participants stressed the strong need for an internationalist spirit and internationalist actions in day-to-day trade union work. One from the UK shared his experience of using a European Works Council to get in touch with other trade unionists all over Europe, to build common strategies.

Yes, we have to push for internationalism in our unions, but we cannot substitute for workers’ participation, warned the participant from Norway. *“Democracy means participation.”*

Organising models and structures

This discussion group, chaired by Josua Mata, of the Alliance for Progressive Labour in the Philippines and member of the GLI Advisory Board, focussed on union organising models and structures, and asked what is relevant in today’s world.

One participant spoke of the organising models being exported from the USA over the past few years, and suggested that they are actually inappropriate, both for trade unions in Europe and North America, and for the unions in the global South. The lack of heavy industry,

manufacturing and traditionally organised industries in the global North is increasingly making the organising models of the 20th century redundant. Few traditional trade union strongholds remain.

Transnational migration is also undermining the traditional organising models. The trade union movement has a duty to adapt to and shape these changes.



In Britain, Unite has pioneered the ‘community membership’ model, in which trade unions integrate into the community, offering very low membership fees and cooperating with wider social movements and demands. A similar model of community organising has also been successful in the Philippines. The community-based organisation of Filipino domestic workers has grown into a transnational network, reaching emigrant communities in places such as Hong Kong.

Khalid Mahmood from Pakistan, by contrast, spoke of the lack of organisation of both the formal and informal sectors in his country, indeed a lack of an organising strategy, particularly in the vast agricultural sector. However, new strategies are developing. One has a focus on building membership within the already organised sectors,

as a platform for reaching out to the unorganised – though this needs to be done without reverting to a bureaucratic approach, he cautioned. Another approach is to use local literacy centres to strengthen links between the organised and unorganised.

Stewards and ‘shop’ (workplace) union structures remain important - when adapted to the increasingly informal nature of employment. European trade unions should also be prepared to go back to their ‘roots’, strengthen the already organised to reach out further, and adapt their traditional organising models to changing employment conditions.

The level of organisation already taking place in the global South needs to be studied by the global labour movement and is an important step forward. Organisations such as StreetNet International have been successful in fostering the organisation of informal, self-employed, precarious and non-traditional workers, and this experience must be shared with the international labour movement.

The direction capitalism develops in will, to a large extent, dictate the direction of the trade union movement, and define its aims. However, by integrating new groups of workers and forms of employment into the movement, and redefining our shared aims and interests, we can make our response to these changes more representative of those that it effects.

Ultimately, the global South needs to play a leading role in developing the international trade union movement.

Meanwhile, support from the global trade union movement for local labour movements is becoming more important than ever for building trade unions, both in the global North and the global South.

Tensions between public and private sector unions also need to be addressed to ensure solidarity develops, along both national and international lines. This is especially true in some countries, like Pakistan, where deep divisions exist between the two sectors.

A new wave of organisation, and increased coordination between different trade unions, demands a new leadership. Young members must be encouraged to take up the leadership of the trade union movement.

In the global North, re-regulation of the labour market is now being conducted by agencies without trade union involvement. In the USA today, one-third of workers are subject to a licence to practice. In 1980, this was only one in twenty. So, ‘self-employed’ workers are also crucial for the future of the trade union movement. They are present in all sectors and regions, and yet traditional organising and bargaining models usually do not recognise this group.

Even as markets and economies become more globalised, language barriers are still preventing trade unions from cooperating effectively internationally, and even within countries where unions need to organise new flows of migrant workers. Whilst companies have the resources to deal with this issue, trade unions must find new ways to overcome this obstacle.

“Kill Off the Myths”

In a later plenary discussion, Pat Horn from StreetNet International asked everyone to “*kill off the myths*”. We need to beware of the term “*unorganised*”, she said, because many workers, including informal ones, often organise themselves. We need to keep open mind and recognise this.



We also need to avoid, she said, assumptions about collective bargaining - that is “*impossible*” for informal workers. This is not at all true. Informal workers’ organisations are very active in establishing negotiating and collective bargaining procedures with

official bodies who are not ‘employers’ as such but certainly control significant aspects of their working life. An example is municipal authorities who control the spaces in which street traders and waste-pickers operate. There are also some interesting linguistic distinctions (for example, between English, Spanish and French) in terminology and definitions, such as the term ‘own-account workers’ – which can affect legal terminology, and in turn even require changes in laws and regulations.

Others agreed that the unions which are growing in strength are those which are reaching out to involve workers of many different kinds, challenging the traditional patterns of social dialogue with ‘partners’ (governments and employers), and finding new types of collective bargaining. It is almost as if we are rethinking what is a ‘union’, one said, and this has implications too for the types of internationalism we build.

“Trade unions are seeing a growth in international solidarity among members. Conferences increasingly pass motions in support of international campaigns and workers’ struggles in other countries. Members are becoming more vocal about international solidarity”.

Sam Goldsmith, Rail, Maritime and Transport workers’ union (RMT), UK

The New Capitalism – Financialisation, the Banks and the State

Peter Rossman is Communications Director at the IUF, the global union federation for workers in agriculture, food processing, hotels and catering and allied sectors. For Rossman, trade unions have failed to come to grips with how corporations are transforming themselves, and this is a major factor in the current crisis of the labour movement globally.



The success of both trade unions and social democratic parties in the post-war boom decades was, he said, based on four assumptions, that:

- companies invest and create jobs
- these investments result in productivity gains
- workers are able to capture a portion of these gains
- these gains are not only to the benefit of workers but also to the public at large.

However, these assumptions no longer hold, for the simple reason that, in a regime of ‘shareholder value’, corporations devote a declining proportion of their cash flow to productive investment. Instead, that which goes to investors in the form of dividends and share buybacks is increasing. In this scenario, investors see both fixed assets and employees as a liability.

This has tremendous implications for the way we understand corporations, how unions bargain collectively with them, and the issues around which trade unions must organise industrially and politically.

The Porsche question

Rossman cited the question posed by the Financial Times in a 2008 article: “*Is Porsche a carmaker or really a hedge fund in disguise?*” The answer is that it is both.

The distinction between financial and non-financial entities has been blurred. This is the real meaning of ‘financialisation’: companies are not only competing for market share in product or service markets, but competing to deliver the highest rates of return in *financial* markets. The ‘non-financial corporation’ is now managed as a ‘bundle of disposable assets’, where short-term capital gains override industrial logic.

Rates of return in the financial sector (finance, insurance, real estate) skyrocketed following the deregulation begun in the 1980s. Investors now demand the same rate of return from products and services as they do from leveraged loans or other financial products. This has a profound impact upon the working and living conditions of workers who are engaged in the manufacture or delivery of these products and services.

The ILO, in its most recent ‘World of Work’ report, recognises the important role these changes play. Yet it is often reduced by unions to a ‘corporate governance issue’ whereas, Rossman said, it is

actually a matter of class exploitation and value extraction which requires a response based on ‘struggle’.

Financialised corporations channel a declining amount of their cash into jobs and capacity building. A greater portion is spent servicing the steadily rising demands of investors. Rossman outlined a range of strategies that companies employ to meet this investor demand:

- A sharp reduction in capital expenditure as a percentage of revenue is one way to free up cash to meet investor demands.
- Non-financial corporations can, as the ILO report notes, increasingly load up on financial products. In this way, Porsche is not unique.
- Revenue is increasingly generated through intellectual property in the form of royalties through patents, trademarks and branding. This revenue constitutes a rent captured through monopoly ownership - whereby revenue is generated outside the company’s own activities, further blurring the financial/non-financial distinction.
- Companies can boost returns by taking on massive amounts of debt to finance buybacks and rising dividends, borrowing money to give back more to investors. This ‘corporate looting spree’ harms workers by transferring risk and by requiring them to finance the growing burden of interest as a portion of cash flow.

‘Unileverland’, South Africa

As companies cut back on productive investment, financialisation entails the casualisation and ‘precariatisation’ of work where companies steadily eliminate direct, fixed employment. Workers in transnational companies not only compete against one another, but increasingly compete with a growing army of outsourced, casual workers with no formal employment relationship to the company.

Rossman used the example of a management presentation to Unilever workers in Boksburg, South Africa, which was designed to force the workers to accept a massive restructuring involving job cuts, outsourcing and casualisation. The South African workers were ‘benchmarked’ against Unilever workers in China who have no union, and against workers in Pakistan who were themselves competing against a Unilever contract manufacturer in their own country which has not one permanent worker. The South African workers clock in at Boksburg, but are working in ‘Unileverland’.

‘Unileverland’ is an integrated global space built on transfer pricing, offshoring, massive tax avoidance and intellectual property rights, where South African workers are directly competing with workers who produce for Unilever but are not employed by them. This is a crucial area of work for the Global Union Federations. Reversing the trend towards casualisation by fighting for permanent jobs is fundamental to this work, as are raising the wage floor and developing real and not simply rhetorical support for members’ organising and bargaining.

A further consequence of declining investment and casualisation is a massive increase in speedup as workers everywhere are squeezed to produce more out of less. The historic trend to reduced working hours has been halted and reversed. Rossman gave the examples of tourism, where housekeepers are now required to clean up to 18 and even 30 rooms a shift, compared to the industry norm of 12 rooms only ten years ago. Brazil's sugar industry underwent the greatest expansion in the crop's history, but cane cutters now cut 10 or more tonnes a day – up from an average of 4 tonnes two decades ago. Line speeds in the meat processing industry have doubled and even tripled.

From ‘Unileverland’ to ‘Investorland’

However, ‘Unileverland’ is a part of a larger space which we can call ‘Investorland’. ‘Investorland’ has been built up through a series of defeats inflicted on the labour movement, on the one hand, and through investor treaties which are misleadingly called trade

agreements, on the other. Their fundamental purpose is to force national states to surrender their capacity to regulate both capital flows and public resources in the public interest. ‘Investorland’ is a space where corporations can actually sue governments for maintaining public services and labour and environmental standards - which are the results of decades of struggle.

We have experienced a seismic shift from the Keynesian consensus of the long boom, said Rossman. We live and work in a financialised environment which severs wages from productivity growth, de-links consumption from declining real wages through the expansion of credit-based household finance, de-links stock markets from the real value of their underlying assets, and frees governments from their fundamental obligation to provide for the elderly by subcontracting the job to the stock market.

Rossman pointed out that the increased integration of wage-earners into financial circuits through the privatisation of pensions and the expansion of credit has made it difficult for unions to struggle coherently against the regime of enhanced investor rights. Unions are finding it hard to formulate and fight for an alternative to the recurrent and devastating crises, of which austerity in the Eurozone is simply the latest manifestation. Financial markets and the threat of pension losses create an element of permanent blackmail. Unions urgently need to find ways to “*cut the umbilical cord between care of the elderly and financial markets*”, he said.

Labour has been largely paralysed in the current crisis where, in many countries, governments have been forced to nationalise major financial institutions. The bank bailouts have been funded by wage-earners, but governments everywhere have deliberately structured these operations by taking non-voting shares and then surrendering their shares to investors as quickly as possible, paving the way for the next crisis.

Democratic control is what is clearly needed to tackle the major challenges facing the globe. Yet mainstream labour has failed to articulate that demand and prepare to fight for it. The labour

movement has fallen behind in developing a programme of its own. Rossman concludes that what is needed is a “*programme of democratic control*” under which banking would be run as a public utility.



Global Unions – Global Politics

Elizabeth Tang of the Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions (HKCTU) chaired this plenary session on the role of Global Unions in an increasingly globalised economy. Changes in work and employment mean that ‘business unionism’ can no longer meet the members' need for international solidarity. There is an urgent need to develop the political aspects of global unionism.

A ‘Rough Guide’ to the Movement

International trade unionism can seem like an impenetrable alphabet soup of acronyms. To understand the movement you have to deconstruct the jargon. **Dave Spooner** of the GLI in the UK gave a summary of the current structures of global unionism.

There are two forms of international trade union bodies. Global Union Federations (GUFs) are based along sectoral lines (such as services or manufacturing) and funded through national union affiliations – the rough equivalent of a cup of coffee per member per year in dues. The other form of global union structure is the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), the assembly of national union confederations –the ‘TUC of TUCs’, in Spooner’s words.

There are currently eight GUFs, each varying in size and politics. The current global union structures are expected to remain as they are for some time following the IndustriALL merger of manufacturing GUFs in 2012. GUFs usually encompass over 100 member countries and hundreds of member unions. The International Union of Foodworkers, for example, represents 370 unions in 127 countries, with a combined membership of roughly 11m workers.

The ITUC was formed in 2006 as a merger of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) and the World Confederation of Labour (predominantly Catholic unions), joined by some former World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU) affiliates.

The WFTU, which had been composed mostly of former Soviet bloc ‘unions’, *“has stubbornly refused to go away”* and is currently trying to reinvent itself. Most unions however are linked to the much larger ITUC. The persistence of the WFTU means the *“ideological rivalry at the heart of the international trade union movement”* is still alive.

The danger of mergers, like that which led into the ITUC, is that the new bodies, in order to balance very different political perspectives, resort to ‘lowest common denominator’ politics. The idea of ‘one big union’ envisioned by the ‘Wobblies’² (see box) would be tempting were it not for this problem.

So what is the ITUC’s role? The ITUC represents trade union interests at an international level, particularly at the International Labour Organisation (ILO). It campaigns for workers’ rights, conducts research, and co-ordinates solidarity actions. At the core of the ITUC’s approach is the concept of ‘decent work’. However, this implies the defence of employment rights and relationships that are increasingly marginal to the realities of working life, especially in the global South.

Labour in a global market

In the 1960s, GUFs began to talk about ‘World Company Councils’. Then the idea of international collective bargaining began to emerge with International Framework Agreements (IFAs) with individual multinational corporations, embodying the idea of a ‘basic framework of relationships’. However, for Spooner, many of these IFAs may have now degenerated into *“little more than so-called ‘corporate social responsibility’ marketing exercises”*.

² ‘The Wobblies’ is a nickname for the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW). The IWW is a trade union movement founded in the USA in the early 1900s. There it engaged in high profile, militant struggles, from which it built an international membership. It still exists today, with members largely in the US, Canada, Europe and Australia: www.iww.org

Organisationally, a new style has emerged in the North, pioneered by the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) in the USA. It is based on a highly professionalised “*evangelical method of organising*” of mass campaigning, with professional training favoured over political education. “*Squads of organisers are now being trained... but education departments of unions are being shut down and replaced with professionalised training departments*”.

The question for global union federations in a global market is this: are GUFs to be mere ‘telephone exchanges’ or political movements? In the post WWII period, some federations had indeed become just contact points for union figures. Clearly GUFs must adapt to take up their new role as bodies capable of effectively organising and negotiating globally. A stumbling block to this, however, is the idea of ‘social partnership’ which dominates European politics. In this ‘partnership’, governments lead a social dialogue with responsible employers and trade unions. The problem, however, is that multinational corporations are often wholly *irresponsible* partners.

Discussion Points

In the discussion that followed, participants asked whether there are truly global unions to deal with the global employers. As Dan Gallin (GLI Geneva) made clear, as yet there is no *global* union in the sense of superseding the need for national unions, even though many unions, particularly in transport, do work internationally.

So what are the GUFs for? International solidarity campaigns is one area of activity, but clearly limited. In Pakistan, for example, textile trade unionists were recently given jail sentences of 590 years, and yet there was little concrete support from the GUFs. “*We need more solidarity from these Global Unions*”, argued Khalid Mahmood of the Labour Education Foundation there.

It national unions are to remain affiliated to the GUFs and the ITUC as they are, members are right to ask “*Who owns the Global Unions?*”, said Justina Jonas from Namibia. For unions in the global South, that cup of coffee per member in affiliation fees is a lot of

money they may not have. Members judge their own unions on how they meet their expectations. It is the same for the Global Unions. They must be visible and show solidarity with struggling workers, both North and South.

Pat Horn of StreetNet International emphasised the need to recognise the new organising strategies being applied in the South and include these in the debate to get a truly global view. The international institutions of the union movement are still highly Eurocentric, if only because that's where the industrial union movement arose, and where most formal union membership and finance still reside.

"No doubt we have our inadequacies", replied Ron Oswald of the IUF global union federation. However, he added, it is important not to be cynical or 'one-dimensional' about the GUFs. After pressure from the IUF, every Coca-Cola plant in Pakistan is now unionised, the only place where Coca-Cola is 100% union. Some Global Unions are more 'top-down' than others. They are, after all, also a reflection of their membership, their affiliated unions. Hopefully, this Summer School will contribute towards better global unions, he said.

For Peter Hall-Jones of the New Unionism Network the real question is *"What would a global union be – what would it mean to be a member of it?"* His view is that workers themselves need to be members of the Global Unions, as well as, or perhaps instead of, affiliated unions.

The Political Challenge for Global Unions

Three groups discussed what we want from the Global Unions and how they can be made more relevant and effective for the needs of workers, and society, today.

International solidarity ‘has to be seen to be believed’

Steve Early of Labor Notes (USA) led a wide-ranging discussion on successes and failures in attempts at international organisation, particularly the interplay between international, national and local union structures, and the relationship between members, their unions, and the global federations to which their unions affiliate.



Sam Goldsmith from the UK’s RMT said that, while the idea of global unions is ‘fine’ and ‘noble’, they often take a bureaucratic form. He queried their relevancy to the needs and aspirations of lay members. Ben Egan of the NUT, also in the UK, thought that global unions might be too ‘abstract’ compared with the strong sense of identity felt within active, mobilising unions at a local or

national level. When this identity and collective will is absent, there is less desire to take action in solidarity with others, even if you share common goals, he said. Similar fears about the relevancy of international organisation to everyday union activity were raised by others too. Ozgur Doruk of DISK in Turkey asserted that the working class in his country has not felt a sense of international solidarity for some time.

For Steve Early, the way out of this has to be to move away from bureaucratic forms of international activity. He gave the example of a solidarity fund, where voluntary financial contributions from US workers are sent direct to a Colombian public employees’ group. When Barack Obama tried pushing through a bilateral trade

agreement between the USA and Colombia, the organisation mobilised in joint activity. An emergency response system is in place for when Colombian workers are abducted, locked up or followed by the security forces. So US lay union members are mobilised in a way that allows them to intervene and save lives. This has made the international situation *real* for them in a way that big bureaucracy does not. Early says that international solidarity “*has to be seen to be believed*”.

There is also the question of tactics - what shape international solidarity takes. Ozgur Doruk recounted how numerous letter-writing campaigns achieved nothing more than thousands of protest letters piling up in the Turkish Prime Minister’s office. Early suggested it might as well be used as ‘toilet paper’ by those in power.

Then the matter of the representation of members and unions in international structures was raised. Early described it as the “*obvious and ever present tension between the top-down and bottom-up approaches to international solidarity*”.

How well are the demands of union members reflected in global structures? Jayesh Patel of the RMT union (UK) echoed something said in an earlier discussion by Khalid Mahmood from Pakistan - that organisations must reflect their memberships. Patel questioned whether or not they do this effectively on the global stage. Mary Sayer, also of Unite, shared her experience that engagement with global structures is largely limited to those at the top of national unions rather than the membership.

And what about the role of the national unions in the global structures? Burcu Ayan described how the International Union of Foodworkers is structured. IUF affiliated unions pay a fee based on their size and development, but they all have equal representation at the IUF. This gives balance between regions, and allows the regions to define their own priorities. In this way, decision-making runs from bottom-up rather than top-down. When, for example, affiliates and/or their regional structures enter into a fight with a TNC, the role of the

global body is purely to link up struggles and to offer concrete solutions, for example for negotiations.

Ayan recalled the question posed earlier: “*Who owns the global federations?*” For her, the answer is that they are owned by both the individual unions and the workers they represent. GUFs cannot simply represent one or the other; after all unions should be the collective voice of their members.

There are tensions between the local and the global, though. Recent IUF activities in Turkey received a poor response from affiliated national unions, limiting the amount that the international body could achieve. It provides an example of the way in which the GUFs ultimately reflect their membership. ‘Concrete action’ on their demands can only be taken with the membership’s cooperation.

There was, however, consensus on some areas where the international bodies should be trying harder. One is fee structures. Patel asked about ‘value for money’, what members get for their dues. Ajai Ray, from the ITF in Nepal, relayed the difficulties of this issue. In developing countries, if fees are increased, membership inevitably decreases. In response to this, according to Ayan, the IUF has introduced a 3-tier membership fee structure, paid according to level of national development. Whichever fee they pay, all affiliates get an equal representation at IUF Congress. Even so, some participants suggested that stronger unions ought to contribute enough to allow smaller unions to affiliate for free.

Global Unions’ role on the international stage was another area of discussion, for example with regard to the ‘Arab Spring’. As Ahmed Elgenedy, of the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung in Cairo, said, in the wake of the Egyptian revolution there has been a wave of initiatives for independent unions, but the Government of Egypt has continued its political and material support for the state-controlled unions associated with the old regime. So, Early asked, “*How can the international bodies help open up a space for the new independent unions?*” The new independent Egyptian unions do not have the finance and structure of the old ones, and there is little coordination

between them. Elgenedy suggested that what is required, especially from the global confederation ITUC is a directly political role, applying pressure on the Egyptian Government to recognise the independent trade union movement. If not, valuable momentum will be lost. This situation may well be similar in other countries.

There are, however, examples of successful intervention by GUFs in Egypt. Elgenedy recounted the case of two global corporations who were violating labour standards and underpaying their workers. Following an unfruitful event organised in Cairo, the GUFs put pressure on the corporate headquarters elsewhere.

Speaking from the perspective of an international federation, Ayan conceded that *“there is no ‘magic wand’ to make everything a success”*. However, she gave another example of the power of international organisation. In a one-hour period at the recent IUF Congress, tens of thousands of dollars were raised for the sacked workers of a Nestle factory in Indonesia. This and the pressure that the IUF exerted on Nestle led to the workers getting their jobs back. www.nespressure.org

Such activities that directly involve union members can bring a reality to international solidarity in a way that bureaucratic ones cannot. This reinforces what Early had said, that international solidarity *“has to be seen to be believed”*.

Needed: ‘A new political agenda’

Kirill Buketov of the TNC Research and Campaigns Department of the IUF global union federation opened this discussion by suggesting that we need to focus less on how Global Unions function and more on what they do - what we need them for.

It soon became clear that many present feel the Global Unions have moved too far from the ‘fighting roots’ of unionism, now



emphasising too much their social dialogue with governments and employers. In this era of rapacious global capitalism and its constant attacks on workers, many felt they need to go ‘back to basics’. The free flow of capital, more precarious/irregular work, greater levels of migration for work: unless they meet such challenges better, the Global Unions are in danger of losing their relevance.

Umberto Bandiera comes from the Unia union in Switzerland, a country where a number of Global Unions have their headquarters, and Unia has members who work in these structures. For him, the Global Unions are too concerned with compromise and consensus in arenas like the ILO. Meanwhile, capital is fighting a war against workers’ rights everywhere. It started with neoliberalism in the Third World, but now it is in Europe too. In fact, we are seeing the destruction of the European social model. *“We need Global Unions that fight with all the determination that this period demands. Otherwise there will be no Global Unions in the future”*, he warned.

It was, as Karin Pape from Germany noted, historically a huge achievement for workers to be represented in discussions at such high levels, not to have to struggle for everything. In the 20th century, social democracy had its successes in the development of the welfare state. However, the unions got tied into it, and it is in any case now being lost through ‘austerity’.

So, union leaders need to change dramatically from the ‘consensus’ that they think they have with the political elites. We need a new political agenda to challenge the systems of the global economy – including the international bodies that orchestrate it such as the World Trade Organisation, the International Monetary Fund, etc., as well as the nation states that support it. Some spoke of an ‘ideological poverty’ in much of the union movement at global level. Where is their voice against the financial crisis and austerity? We need more information circulating on who owns and controls what, in whose interests, etc. We need more political discussion about what kind of world we want, about how to return economic and political power to working people.

For one British participant, the key question about the crisis is the control of wealth – not just its redistribution. In only a few countries have we witnessed confrontation over the control of key resources, such as in Bolivia and Venezuela. Unless the Global Unions take this on, there will be no redistribution, neither in class terms, nor North-South, he said.

What is more, ‘social partnership’ has made unions technocratic and uninteresting. Those in the mass movements against the status quo tend to see unions as ‘part of the system’. Unions say ‘support us’ but they need to become part of the fight against the system.

Many felt that the Global Unions seem too far removed from workers, too invisible. Most workers know little about them, the campaigns they are running, what technical or political support they can offer, etc. Other international groups like Greenpeace are well-known, because they do mass international campaigns. But the Global Unions have not built that kind of profile. And how well do the Global Unions take on board what workers are saying? There is a big question whether workers see themselves as part of the Global Unions, even whether they see themselves as linked to workers elsewhere. How can we get a better sense of ‘ownership’ by workers of ‘our’ Global Unions?

Others did recognise that the GUFs do try to build solidarity. One example is the BWI’s ‘World Cup’ campaign for the rights of construction workers in South Africa who built the football stadiums. So are the email alerts from LabourStart and other GUFs asking for solidarity, though clearly getting emails 2-3 times a week is not enough. The Nestle campaign by the IUF is a good example of circulating information on ‘why this company is not what you think it is’. A number of GUFs have developed structures to foster solidarity among those across the world who are employed by the same multinational corporation.

However, as Pat Horn of StreetNet noted, we need other ways of transcending national boundaries in our organising. Many workers

are not 'employed' in this way. She gave the example of cross-border informal traders, with whom StreetNet is working.

It is true that most GUFs have very small staff numbers, and they work long hours. So, as Sandy Cijntje from Curaçao said, *"We also need to give more support and information to them"*. Kirill Buketov added, *"If you are a union member, you are part. We are the Global Unions. It is not 'us and them'. The IUF considers all the staff and representatives of its affiliated unions also as part of our workforce."*

However, some felt it not so easy to feel part, that the Global Unions are too 'European', their leadership still today largely European men. The models of unionism they promote do not necessarily work elsewhere. There are tensions between advanced capitalist countries and developing countries, for example. The pressure on small unions to raise enough money to pay affiliation dues the Global Unions can be resented.

Another participant felt there is a need to move from a simple North-South post-colonial analysis. Now we have major new economies moving across continents, for example Chinese companies operating in much of Africa. How are the Global Unions facing up to this challenge? Others want the Global Unions to respond better to union repression (e.g. in Turkey), and the emerging democratic unions of the Arab world (e.g. in Egypt), not just by email campaigns but by sending rank-and-file delegations.

Kirill Buketov summed it up. *"We are moving into a new political agenda. Social welfare made unions 'part of the system' where they got involved in 'tripartism' and signed deals with governments and employers. There is a feeling in society that this has to be changed. Today it is not enough just to support the struggles for justice, such as the 'Occupy' movement. Unions must become central to these struggles. And the Global Unions need to be involved in escalating these struggles to the international level, because locally the fight against global injustice and capitalism cannot be won. We also need to be proactive, anticipate what 'they' will throw at us next, and organise accordingly."*

Pat Horn agreed. In her view, *“We lament too easily. We have to look where the opportunities are”*. Workers are taking up many issues that are common internationally – for public services, against water privatisation, etc. There is massive dissent against the financial system because of the banking crisis. We need Global Unions that will tap into this, be more visible and vocal themselves, and facilitate union members to be so too - internationally.

Grassroots organising – on a global scale?

Jin Sook Lee from the BWI chaired this discussion, which focussed on the practical issues that GUFs face in organising internationally.

Despite capital and labour becoming increasingly ‘globalised’, trade unions remain primarily national, and the Global Union Federations (GUFs) remain organised by sector. For Guy Standing from Bath University (UK), these divisions *“reflect yesterday, not today”*, and do not relate to the modern world of work. GUFs still often appear to be more concerned with organised male workers in the formal workforce and in the global North, than unorganised women workers, particularly those in part-time and largely invisible service sector industries and in the global South. Nonetheless, it is more vital than ever to engage with GUFs.



The Swiss union Unia offers a shining example in recognising the urgent need to organise women and the service sector; if we don’t organise such workers *“we’ll lose ground completely”*, said Corinne Scharer. Swiss migrant workers are organising, and a negotiated collective agreement now exists for domestic workers. The recently

won ILO Convention C189 for the rights of domestic workers was fundamental to success in these negotiations.

However, trade unions face a conflict of interest, said Karoly Gyorgy of the National Confederation of Trade Unions in Hungary, and member of the GLI Advisory Board. For him, national unions tend to want production to shift to their countries “*with the prospect of more fee-paying members*”, even though unions in other countries will lose members in the relocation.

By contrast, Shalini Trivedi of the Self-Employed Women’s Association (SEWA) in India does see unionism changing to the ‘new’ global context. The passing in 2011 of the C189 was a significant achievement, only won through the support of national and global unions.

In global industries, negotiations at local or national level – with governments or employers – are not enough. Global bodies are necessary. The BWI global federation for building and construction workers recently spearheaded a campaign to win labour rights standards for European football championship stadiums. Raising public awareness by working with the media, organising new members, developing national and international trade union alliances, and learning from the South African construction workers’ union’s experiences proved indispensable, said Vasyl Andreyev of the Construction Workers’ Union of Ukraine.

Inflicting reputational damage on corporations, as in the case of Swiss pharmaceutical giant Novartis, is important to shift opinion and the balance of power in favour of workers. For Josua Mata from the Philippines, global unionism must be radical, rejecting such things as Free Trade Agreements rather than just seeking to amend minor clauses in them. It is “*hard to establish a movement*” against global injustices, but a campaign’s failure in one country does not mean failure in the next.

‘Unorthodox’ Trade Unionism

Informal and precarious work is too often ignored by unions. Yet as Mata pointed out, the informal sector is more ‘organised’ than we think – just not in the traditional understanding of the word. Karoly Gyorgy agreed. In his country, Hungary, 99% of companies and 70% of employees are in micro- to medium sectors – out of reach of ‘traditional’ trade unionism - and yet workers are organising themselves. Andreyev explained that his union has hugely helped migrant workers in the Ukraine simply by giving them ‘passports’ notifying them of their human rights, which has been useful in preventing problems with the police.

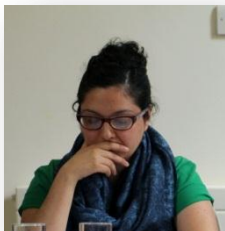
And GUFs have started to recognise a need to organise the informal economy. The BWI has helped SEWA in India, for example, to develop skills training for informal women construction workers in collaboration with universities, and to create a ‘tool library’ for those workers to acquire the tools they need. The Global Unions can be frustrating, though. Shalini Trivedi from SEWA recalled explaining to a BWI conference her union’s progress in entering into 50 collective bargaining contracts in just three years. Instead of congratulations, she was met with an intense debate on the definition of collective bargaining.

“Especially today, with the growth of precarious work and a breakdown of formal employment, we need to rework the entire organising structure for the 21st century. Using new communications technology, we can build much more horizontal, member-to-member, branch-to-branch, links and activities. We can and should create space for this, and let it grow organically, rather than top-down.” Walton Pantland, USi

Precarious and Informal Work – the Politics of the ‘Precariat’

Who speaks out for the interests of precarious and informal workers?

And what is the political agenda of these workers?



Priscilla Gonzalez was the Director of the Domestic Workers United (DWU), an organisation of Caribbean, Latina and African nannies, housekeepers, and elderly caregivers in New York, who are organising for power, respect, and fair labour standards, and to help build a movement to end exploitation and oppression for all.

The DWU is also one of the organisations that founded, in 2007, the National Domestic Workers Alliance (NDWA) in the USA. This now encourages the sharing of experiences and organising strategies, and supports local struggles, across the country. It is helping to build a strong and successful movement of domestic workers there.

There are about 2.5 million domestic workers in the USA. Most are women, from minority communities or migrants from the Global South. Their work is at the same time essential and invisible. They often face very severe forms of exploitation. This is not surprising, as domestic work in the USA has its roots in slavery, and was historically the fate of black women. These workers are considered exploitable and not even worthy of protection in the law. Furthermore, for decades the demands of domestic workers were generally ignored both by the labour and the women's movements in the USA. This sector has generally been considered as impossible to organise, notably because of the domestic and isolated nature of the workplaces.

The good news, however, is that “*We are organising. And we are winning!*” She described one organising tactic in New York, which has been via the doormen who can be found in every building in the wealthy areas. These doormen are organised into a union and were asked to reach out to domestic workers working in their buildings. They agreed to help the DWU, not least because most of them are likely to be the sons and daughters, or partners, of domestic workers! The experience of US domestic workers is that “*the neighbourhood is actually the shopfloor*”, and this is where organising strategies need to be focussed.

In the State of New York in 2004, after a long fight, a domestic workers’ Bill of Rights was agreed. It was the first legal recognition of domestic work in the USA. The campaign helped build the membership and there are currently about 9,000 members in New York. Actually, the union has even received support from some employers who were eager to receive legal guidelines. This successful campaign in New York has given the impetus for similar campaigns in other parts of the country. Official organised labour is now recognising domestic workers unions. The AFL-CIO even agreed to include domestic workers in its official delegation at the ILO in Geneva in 2011, when the historic international Convention on Decent Work for Domestic Workers C189 was passed.

Because they are subject to multiple oppressions, organised domestic workers are a very active part of most radical political movements taking place today in the USA, be they the women’s movement, the migrants’ movements, and also the ‘Occupy!’ movement. Domestic workers know very well the ‘1%’ - because they are their employers.

The next challenge for domestic workers is the crisis of care currently developing in the USA, as across the world. As the population ages, new needs for domestic work and care arise. In a broad coalition with other organisations, domestic workers in the USA have a new campaign ‘Caring Across Generations’ to fight for better working conditions and career possibilities for carers.

These examples show that, as a workers' movement, we should stop arguing about the 'political feasibility' of our demands. Rather, she said, we should get on with organising and thereby make things possible. "*We are the hopes and dreams of the working class*".

Domestic Workers United, New York, USA: www.domesticworkersunited.org

National Domestic Workers Alliance (NDWA), USA:

www.domesticworkers.org

Caring Across Generations: www.caringacrossgenerations.org

Discussion Points

Discussion immediately started on the reality of the 'precariat' as a new class, as separate from the working class. For participants from the UK, precarious workers are not new and, if only unions could find better ways to organise them, they could be a very powerful force. What is more, organising precarious workers is not restricted by the anti-unions laws that exist. Yet 'stable' workers often feel threatened by precarious workers, and so we must find appropriate organising techniques, and common struggles. For instance, unions need to fight against agency labour, but they should certainly not alienate agency workers, who often do feel excluded by union campaigns. In Switzerland, the private sector union has negotiated a framework agreement for agency workers, but this has led to tensions within the union.

A participant from Egypt argued that employment relations in the South are defined by precarious and informal work. Therefore the notion of a 'precariat' as a separate class does not make much sense. It merely registers the 'precarisation' of workers in the Global North. In India, informal employment relations are on the rise, especially for women, said a participant from there. Global Union Federations should be more active on this issue, as it is often transnational companies who use contract workers.

Karin Pape reinforced the point, as she reflected on her decade-long experience with informal workers' organising. Secure and stable jobs have always been the exception, in her view. This form of employment essentially applied to white industrial male workers, in a

limited number of Northern countries, and over a relatively short period of time.

Participants were agreed that unions need to find new ways of organising and gaining access to scattered workplaces. However, the example of domestic workers shows that unions are starting to recognise informal and precarious workers.

Priscilla Gonzalez wrapped up the discussion with the following synthesis:

- The ‘precariat’ is not a new class. It has been part of the world of work for years. It is not confined to the global South, and is growing in the North.
- Trade unions need to engage with the issues of precarisation and informality. This is all the more important as some union members feel threatened by precarious workers.
- Trade unions should learn from the successful experiences of organising in precarious environments, notably in the South.

“The worst thing ... to go back to the old normal”

Guy Standing is Professor of Economic Security at Bath University in the UK. It is his analysis that contemporary capitalism has encouraged the creation of a new class, what he calls the ‘*precariat*’.

The traditional ‘proletariat’ came about, he said, through a process whereby workers were wedded to a life of ‘endless drudgery’ in fixed, boring occupations, in fixed, boring workplaces. Today, however, we have a process of ‘precariatisation’, where millions of workers are wedded to a life of unstable labour, in a state of perpetual insecurity.

Largely in jobs with little prospect of progression, many treat work as just a way to earn some money - emotionally and psychologically



detached from the labour they perform. Unlike the traditional proletariat, they lack a sense of occupational identity. This is reflected in low union membership among this new class of worker.

How should unions respond? We might be tempted to treat these workers as victims, but this would be a mistake. Many in the precariat aspire to have a different relationship to work. They seek more autonomy, control and flexibility with regards to their occupation than the fixed stability of 20th century working-class labour. ‘Scoffing’ at this would be a mistake. Nor should trade unions make the nostalgic demand that this precarious existence is regulated by the return of ‘secure’ labour in stable jobs-for-life, said Standing. So, what form would a ‘Precariat Charter’ take, and how it would differ from standard proletarian demands?

Finding a response is made all the more pressing by the threat of what Standing called ‘the politics of inferno’. This is the possibility that the precariat - insecure and without a traditional occupational identity on which to hang their political worldview – could lapse into support for new fascist movements, as happened in the aftermath of the Great Depression in the 1930s in Europe. The neo-fascist threat stems from the four ‘A’s that Standing attaches to the precariat: anger, alienation, anomie and anxiety - springing from the uncertainty that they experience. Whereas, in the old labourist systems, some risks such as getting sick were insured against, the precariat suffers from profound uncertainty, ‘unknown unknowns’, which makes them a tinderbox primed to explode.

The only safeguard against this threat is a ‘politics of paradise’: egalitarianism, liberty and fraternity (utopian politics that are closer to the demands of the Enlightenment than the ‘Old Left’s programme of socialist command’), according to Standing. Such politics do not treat the precariat as a problem to be solved by shoring up outdated modes of work and life. Instead they should aim to resolve the harmful effects of insecurity, while freeing the precariat up to pursue different, new relationships with employment. For Standing, the key essence is freedom.

Three historical principles should guide our thinking: (1) every new forward march has been based upon the emerging aspirations of new class groupings; (2) these new class groupings develop new forms of collective action and organisation; and (3) these new forms of action and organisation centre around three overlapping struggles: for recognition, representation, and redistribution.

Recognition: The precariat must be treated positively, recognising their self-identity as something different from the traditional proletariat. To illustrate, Standing cited two pieces of graffiti he has seen. One, in Milan, simply read ‘PRECARIAT STRIKE’. Another, in Madrid, said, ‘THE WORST THING WOULD BE TO GO BACK TO THE OLD NORMAL’. This new perspective must be recognised in the labour movement.

Representation: The precariat must be represented “*inside every body and every state agency*”, and that includes the labour movement.

Redistribution: The precariat must be included in the redistribution of key assets, which are:

- **Time:** Workers in the precariat have no control over their time, subject to irregular hours, multiple overlapping jobs, and/or carrying out activities which is ‘work’ but might not fit on the company’s balance sheet. They are generally under-employed compared with their competencies and skills, and over-employed in the amount of activities they have forced upon them. Their lack of control over their time needs to be resolved.
- **Quality space:** Mutually owned public space (‘commons’) has been lost through privatisation. “*The struggle for the commons is a vital part of the precariat’s future*”, but it is also linked to the battles being waged over our ecological system.
- **Knowledge and education:** These need to be ‘de-commodified’ and made much easier for everyone to access.

- **Access to finance and financial knowledge:** The secure ‘salaried’ and the rich can buy the financial knowledge they need from accountants. The precariat does not have the means to turn financial markets to their advantage. We need a ‘socialisation’ of financial capital, new mechanisms of redistribution such as sovereign wealth funds.

We also need a different theoretical approach – especially to differentiate between ‘labour’ and ‘work’. The language and rhetoric of ‘labour’ is too narrow – bound to standard notions of the employment relationship, fixed in a specific time (the statutory working day) and place (the clearly defined factory or office). It no longer reflects the situation under contemporary capitalism. According to Standing, every age has its ‘silliness’ about the definition of work and labour. For example, women’s domestic labour has been seen as inferior compared to ‘proper’ productive activity carried out in the workplace. The way that labour statistics are gathered reflects this gap.

Thinking about ‘work’ rather than ‘labour’ would let us recognise productive activity taking place in every corner of life, more appropriate to the 21st century. ‘Industrial citizenship’ was geared purely around labour rights confined to the workplace. A new notion of ‘occupational citizenship’ would embrace work rights in the whole sphere of life. Trade union demands for ‘decent labour’ should be replaced by demands for ‘dignified work’.

At the practical level, Standing thinks that a basic income, a guaranteed minimum amount, should be paid to all citizens, offering a level of security as a right to all. Historically, trade unions have “vigorously opposed” such moves, he said, preferring to maximise the numbers in standard employment so as to swell the ranks of their memberships. However, a guaranteed basic income could actually improve workers’ bargaining position. Most governments do actually pay out massive subsidies and tax credits to top up declining wages. But, if this money went instead to support a basic income, people could bargain better, and see the paltry settlements offered by employers for what they really are. Demands for a ‘basic income’

system should be the new, radical political programme of the trade union movement.

For Standing, trade unions must resist the simplistic solution of *“putting people back into boring, dead-end jobs”*. There needs instead to be dreaming and utopianism.

“Nothing for us without us”

According to **Pat Horn**, the Coordinator of StreetNet International, the trade union movement should be optimistic about, and encouraged by, the organisation of informal workers globally.

The workers in non-unionised sectors, such as domestic workers and street traders, are organising and successfully undertaking many traditional trade union actions. They are not limiting themselves to old models of organising or collective bargaining, however. So, a key issue is the rise of these new movements and methods of organising by groups of informal workers, and how the international trade union movement should respond.

The new workers’ organisations that are emerging are all self-defining, with differing demands and needs. They are asking questions such as: Who should they be bargaining with? How can they ally with other working class organisations and movements nationally and internationally? However, time and again the problem arises of how workers and activists can best work together, in the global North and South, considering the vastly differing employment relationships that workers in these regions experience.

Horn then turned to the questions set for this session. First: Who speaks out for the interests of precarious and informal workers? Frankly, she said, the answer to this question is obvious. Informal workers should and do speak out for their own interests. In this growing movement of informal workers, the traditional employment relationship doesn’t apply. So, they are usually organising in a situation where the existing laws do not work for them. Therefore, trade unionists and others need to listen to this new working class,

and help to change the laws that affect them. Organising initiatives should be created upon the needs of workers and it is now that the precarious and informal working class needs to begin to take power. As trade unionists, we must understand and embrace again the old adage of “*nothing for us without us*”.

On the second question: What is the political agenda of precarious and informal workers? This agenda is the same as with other workers, she said. The short term agenda is a defensive one of fighting for rights and defending any ground that is made. The long term agenda and vision of this movement is to create a political economy that works for them and their communities - and here there is an emerging vision of a ‘social solidarity economy’. The long term agenda has to form the vision for organising within the movement.

In the case of street vendors, for example, the short term agenda is often to defend the right to public space. Precarious and informal workers’ organisations do engage in collective bargaining, but instead of the traditional employer/employee framework, they have to identify their negotiating counterparts according to which authority is responsible for each particular set of demands, who controls their needs. For instance, street vendors and wastepickers often have to bargain with municipal authorities, who control public space and municipal waste disposal. Workers can easily identify what they need to defend. In many cases the rights of informal workers, which they continuously fight for, are basic human rights.

“Solidarity economy”

When informal workers organise, they are developing a longer term vision for the movement. The struggle of informal workers cannot be focussed on getting out of informal work, and anyway there is no commonly-shared definition of “formalisation”. The emerging vision of informal workers of the kind of formalisation they would like to see developing is recognition in law as workers, integration of the revenue they pay to local government into the official taxation system, access to social protection, rights to direct representation, and formalisation into worker-controlled cooperatives in the

“solidarity economy”. Whether it is a childcare cooperative or a social security cooperative, this is a vision of socialist ideals that could be realised within a capitalist society, and it is informal workers themselves that have made a start on the movement to realising this vision.

In short, constructing a political agenda for the informal workers’ movement means (re)defining:

- WHAT the demands are, e.g. an end to harassment, urban policies, fair trade
- WHO these demands are negotiated with, e.g. municipalities, trade authorities, immigration authorities
- WHICH working class allies to join forces with to fight the class struggles.

Discussion Points

The discussion that followed focussed on whether, and if so how, informal workers can integrate into the existing global trade union movement.

Peter Hall-Jones suggested that organisations of workers such as StreetNet International do not fit a traditional trade union definition and that their forms of struggle differ. So, he asked, does this mean that the ‘precariat’ - instead of being a separate class – is a transformation of the working class? To integrate the numbers of informal workers and their organisations would seem a huge task, given the splintered nature of the working classes. So, how can these workers be integrated into the global union movement?

At the international level, there are emerging informal workers’ networks, and even organisations, supported by those such as Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO). In a sense, StreetNet could call itself a GUF, given its structure. However, the idea with these networks has generally been to create a social movement. The trade union model is seen as too bureaucratic.

Meanwhile, discussions are happening within these networks about how to link in with the global trade union movement. A key message coming out of them is that, for its part, the trade union movement needs to become more familiar with the informal workers' organisations and their discussions.

Bernard Adjei, from the BWI in Ghana, suggested that there is an argument to say that the movement itself needs to move away from traditional trade union structures and forms of organising. Trade unions have always found it difficult to develop alongside the changes in work and in workplaces. It seems that the traditional trade union model has stalled progression and the movement is found wanting in terms of understanding informal associations. Having said this, Ghana has provided a model for integrating informal workers, particularly in the agricultural sector, into the trade unions. The union had to adapt, as numbers of formal workers were dwindling.

“When informal workers are organised, it’s better for all workers.”

So, is there a need for a new kind of global union? This question then produces further ones, such as: how can the many different self-identified needs of the different sectors of workers be met, and what common goals can emerge? Informal workers need to be organised, but there are many different organising models that could be adopted. It would be wrong to insist that one particular model of organising for informal workers. It is not for others to decide on this, but to help explore the possibilities. There is a need to analyse the different models; to see what works and what doesn't. The IUF project *‘Land and Freedom’*, for example, is making steps towards changing the way of thinking - encouraging unions to open up to workers in non-traditional/unclear employment relationships.

Having reached the point of embracing different organising forms, what is the vision for global unions and how do all these organisations coexist in a global union?

The casualisation of work is a huge problem across the world; it has led to a loss of union members and there is a desperate need to

support every single fight for permanent jobs. The key is to get formal, permanent workers to support the struggles of informal workers. This is where benefits for all workers will be reaped.

Internal Democracy and Rank-and-File Participation:

Keys for strong national and international unions

Vasco Pedrina is National Secretary of the Unia union in Switzerland, and Vice-President of the Building & Woodworkers' International (BWI). He also represents the Swiss Federation of Trade Unions (SGB/USS) on the ETUC Executive Committee, and is a member of the GLI Advisory Board. For him, trade union democracy and active rank-and-file participation are two sides of the same coin.



Trade unions were originally developed and run by workers who were also politically and industrially active outside of the workplace. However, with the growth of membership and economic strength, unions tended to develop a bureaucracy of full-time union officials, and along with this went a weakening of rank-and-file participation and union democracy.

In the wake of the Second World War, the emergence of the 'European Social Model' further encouraged the bureaucratisation of unions. During the neoliberal reforms of the 1980s and 1990s, many unions then found themselves paralysed by their bureaucracies. They were confronted with growing individualism, a new generation of US-style management, and the disintegration of social democratic institutions.

Cultural and organisational change

The bureaucratic paralysis of the European union model demands a cultural and organisational change to ensure the survival of the labour movement. How do we make union structures more professional and efficient without undermining democratic participation?

Pedrina said this challenge has been met with some success in Switzerland through various reforms and initiatives:

- Applying the modern management methods of non-government organisations (NGOs) to improve the benefits and services to union members, and to improve the effectiveness of resources.
- Making the distribution of resources more efficient then allows unions to allocate more resources to organising unconventional groups of workers, such as women, informal workers, and the private services sector.
- Engaging the trade union base by (re)gaining a presence in workplaces, with the aim of mobilising a new generation of activists.
- Gaining acceptance for industrial action, and in particular strikes, in certain industries, enabling union power and improving solidarity.
- Mounting political campaigns based around the involvement of grassroots activists and rank-and-file members. Developing this active trade union base is important when leading popular opposition to privatisation and attacks on social security.

More generally, the paternalistic union approach toward rank-and-file members must be replaced by an educational model. Full-time union officials should act as ‘coaches’ for activists and unionised workers, promoting their empowerment and responsibility for the

labour movement. This cultural change is also needed within the rank-and-file, who need to force a more inclusive leadership model.

A truly democratic trade union presupposes the following criteria:

- Credibility
- Independence from political parties and employers
- A combative spirit
- Embodying the principles of equality and social justice it wishes to foster in society

This demands full-time union officials with high moral integrity, who see their occupation as a vocation, and have a keen interest in education.

Internationalism for a democratic trade union movement

To meet the multi-national threats and challenges of the 21st century, national trade union movements need a much deeper internationalist perspective. They need to understand grassroots workers' activism not only in the context of national unions, but also the Global Unions and international social movements.

In the context of the globalisation of capital, the growing importance of regional and inter-government organisations, and the current financial crisis, internationalism is central to the future of the global labour movement.

To counter the ‘national retreat’ within the trade union movement, and the surge in the populist and nationalist forces of the extreme right, trade union leaders must promote:

- Cross-border actions against multinational companies and industries
- Co-operation and international solidarity campaigns
- Opportunities for exchanges and training amongst unions globally

Global unions must play a role in promoting strong and combative trade unionism based on an active trade union base, engage in the conversation about organisation and democracy, and promote international solidarity and exchanges.

Discussion Points

The discussion opened by a participant asking Pedrina to identify what makes a trade union democratic and combative. In order to be combative, he replied, a union does need a clear administrative structure. But a union having a strong presence in the workplace is what gives workers the courage to be combative. Democratisation is two-way, empowering both the leadership and the grassroots membership. This demands an active discussion of grassroots issues by the leaders, grounding them and their strategies in the real issues which affect members.

There was also discussion on the language used in international union activities. One participant said, *“Language can be used to conceal meaning. The current neoliberal offensive uses this dimension of language. The word 'reform' was once progressive; it is now used by reactionaries”,* adding that *“‘Social dialogue’ and ‘social partnership’ is part of Christian conservative corporatist culture aimed at eliminating class conflict”.*

There was much agreement that we should not moderate our language for our 'social partners'. Phrases such as 'social dialogue' and 'social partners' should be replaced by combative language. There needs to be coherence in our attitude, language and approach – we are not in 'partnership' with employers. Pedrina agreed that avoiding a combative culture through language and ideas such as 'social dialogue' is damaging. The trade union movement has a duty to employ combative language, he said.

As for the type of international activity undertaken, a participant spoke of branch-based industrial action as an important tool in targeting companies and governments, and that secondary industrial action - the right to strike on the behalf of other people - should be

part of trade union internationalism.

But another participant talked of the difficulties of mobilising workers for transnational solidarity, and asked Pedrina how Unia and BWI deal with this. Unia is holding its next Congress in December 2012 and they are aiming to “*develop a new tradition of international solidarity*”, he said. Unia is involved in the BWI campaign targeting the 2014 World Cup in Brazil, and the campaign supporting Chinese workers involved in producing gemstones. Significantly, Unia has begun training full-time activists for international solidarity.



Unions, Freedom & Democracy

In this part of the Summer School, participants first turned to Europe, a continent that is facing increasingly right-wing governments and austerity programmes. They looked at the impact, not just on workers' employment terms and conditions, but on fundamental workers' rights – which took huge struggles to achieve and are now at great risk.

Greece provides a particular focus, given the very radical austerity programme foisted on it by the European Union.

Is the European trade union movement responding well enough? What more can and should be done? And what is the interaction between such developments in Europe and the rest of the world?

Then they turned to countries that are emerging from or still struggling against dictatorship, particularly in East/Central Europe, the Arab World and Asia. How well is the global labour movement supporting the labour movements there, and encouraging democracy to gain a stronghold?

Trade Unions and Crises in Europe

A serious attack on workers' fundamental rights

Professor **Keith Ewing** from Kings College, London, discussed the current European crisis, with particular focus on events in Greece. The crisis in Greece is generally talked about as a crisis of society, politics and economics. However, what is barely discussed or taken up, he said, is the illegality of this crisis. There is, in his view, much more that could and should be done about this by the labour movement in Europe.



In September 2011, a High Level Mission visited Greece on behalf of the ILO. The ILO had received numerous communications from Greek trade unions, complaining that the responses to the unfolding crisis were leading to many breaches of ILO Conventions. The resulting 64-page report of the ILO Mission is very important.

It reveals major violations with ILO Conventions, and provides evidence that raises huge doubts about the legality of the bailout negotiated by the 'Troika' of the European Union with the Greek Government, and whether the provisions of the bailout comply with either the EU's Treaty of Lisbon, or the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights.

The ILO report shows that the aim of the Troika was to drive down wages and living standards so as to force through an internal devaluation in Greece. It concludes that the Memorandum of Understanding set out by the Troika with regards to the financial bailout translates into serious reforms to the collective bargaining framework in the country, through:

- 1) 30% wage cuts, which have essentially destroyed the collective bargaining system;
- 2) Allowing enterprise and sectoral level agreements to contain less favourable provisions for workers than national collective agreements; and
- 3) Decentralising the collective bargaining framework from national level to enterprise level, including an opt-out clause for small businesses who can now impose changes to collective agreements through negotiating with ad hoc groups of workers.

Importantly – though unsurprisingly - too, the overall impact of these changes is greater on women workers than men. Women have been more affected by high levels of unemployment, changes to maternity rights, and wage cuts.

Furthermore, due to the changes brought in by the Troika, the recourse to legal processes for workers has faltered. The mechanisms

for labour law enforcement have become slow and unresponsive, and difficult to use effectively.

When the High Level Mission report went back to the ILO Committee of Experts, they produced a further report in 2012³. This reinforced serious concerns about:

- the impact on equality, including fundamental ILO Convention C111 against discrimination; and
- the impact on workers' fundamental rights to freedom of association and collective bargaining – fundamental ILO Conventions 87 and 98.

In terms of European law, provisions of the Treaty of the European Union, which is legally binding on all EU institutions (including the Commission and the European Central Bank) appear to have been violated. Most notably this includes Articles 1 and 2 of the Treaty, which sets out the core values of the EU, including a commitment to the principles of social justice, equality, and democracy.

There are also questions arising under the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights. By Article 12 this includes the right to freedom of association, which the European Court of Human Rights has ruled in the context of the European Convention on Human Rights includes the right to collective bargaining.

So what do we do as trade unionists? The ILO revealed the apparent indifference of the Greek Government and the Troika towards these different legal obligations, but legal strategies are not being used effectively or enough. We should be using this opportunity much better, in Professor Ewing's view.

The labour movement can and should be using legal recourse to fight the clearly illegal practices that have been implemented in Greece. The courts should be another forum for political struggle for

³ Report on the Application of ILO Convention No.98 (1949) on the Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining in Greece, 2012.

the unions. Turkish unions have shown that it is possible to win legal battles in the European Court of Human Rights.

Our movement should be heartened by this and should look to litigation as another weapon to fight these battles, he concluded.

ILO Committee of Experts Report

http://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=1000:13100:0::NO:13100:P13100_COMMENT_ID:2698934:NO

ILO High Level Mission to Greece, September 2011:

www.ilo.org/global/standards/WCMS_170433/lang--en/index.htm

Normlex: ILO Information System on International Labour Standards:

www.ilo.org/normlex

Lisbon Treaty of the European Union, 2009: [www.lisbon-](http://www.lisbon-treaty.org/wcm/sitemap_part1.html)

[treaty.org/wcm/sitemap_part1.html](http://www.lisbon-treaty.org/wcm/sitemap_part1.html)

The Crisis in Greece



Lefteris Kretsos is Senior Lecturer in employment relations at the University of Greenwich in the UK, and a member of the new Syriza political party in Greece. He outlined how the global financial crisis is impacting in Greece, with extreme economic policies being foisted onto the Greek people by the European Union, leading to high social unrest but also the development of new political forces.

The crisis in Greece is presented by mainstream European media and politics as something peculiar to Greece - a case of 'Greek Exceptionalism'. For the labour movement, however, it is a manifestation of the structural weaknesses in the European monetary union project, now exposed by the global financial crisis and renewed European tensions.

The mainstream idea of 'Greek Exceptionalism' is based on various assumptions:

- Radical labour market reforms are ‘necessary’ and ‘urgent’ (arguments pushed by the international institutions IMF, OECD, World Bank, etc.)
- Greek workers are ‘overprotected’
- Strict employment protection legislation inhibits economic growth and undermines economic competitiveness
- The ‘Mediterranean Syndrome’:
 - A low administrative capacity for policy implementation
 - Negative attitudes and resistance towards structural reforms in the economy
- It was an error allowing Greece into the Eurozone
- Greece has a dysfunctional tax system.

As the European financial crisis deepened, European banks gave Greece a programme of internal devaluation and tougher control to reform its economy. It has been told to regain competitiveness by reducing real wages relative to its trade competitors, which could be achieved through decreased wage and cost flexibility. This is essentially the engineering of a recession long enough to lower Greece’s costs relative to its competitors.

The following labour market and social policies have been pursued by Greece in response to this:

- Reduction of minimum wages
- Decentralisation of collective bargaining
- Pension cuts
- Reduction of employment protection for regular workers
- Cuts in public sector wages
- Reduction of public sector employment

Outcomes of the austerity measures in Greece

Meanwhile, in Greece, the reforms have had a significant social and economic impact - unemployment has risen to almost 25%, at least 35% of companies have stopped paying wages, general wage levels are going down, and privatisation is being sped up. The informal economy is expanding, with more de-standardisation of employment,

such as the increasing use of false ‘self-employment’, and more work insecurity. Divisions between ‘standard’ and ‘non-standard’ workers are growing.

In response, there is a growing opposition movement in Greece based around strikes, civil disobedience, radical unionism, Greek ‘Indignados’ (Αγανακτισμένοι), the ‘Don’t Pay’ movement asserting that the people will not pay for the crisis, and the rise of a new left-wing political party Syriza. Since 2010, there have been 12 general strikes, as well as numerous other strikes and occupations of government buildings.

More than 45 new trade unions have been established in the last three years in urban areas of Greece, mostly based on young, immigrant and leftist leadership. The crisis has allowed the growth of ‘real democracy’ in the form of grass-roots activism and leadership. The new unionist movement is also strongly based around social media and networking.

Radical unionism and ‘street politics’ can exert strong pressures on the existing bureaucratic trade union structures, and reform social democratic unionism, in Kretsos’ view.

Meanwhile, Syriza has become the main force for opposition to austerity. It is an amalgam of different political factions and has quickly become popular with dynamic groups within the population, such as urban groups, young people and precarious workers. Syriza is immune to the political scandals and corruption which have plagued other political parties in power in Greece.

Union Responses to the situation in Greece

A discussion group chaired by Ashim Roy of the New Trade Union Initiative in India looked at how the trade unions across Europe are responding to the situation in Greece.

There is an urgent need for European-wide solidarity with Greece. *“Social Europe is now completely disintegrating”*, said Sean

Sweeney of the GLI at Cornell University (USA). Despite its incredible rise, the political programme of the radical left coalition Syriza is not altogether clear. Parties lacking clear programmes are vulnerable to right-wing attacks and disintegration. However, the Left in Greece *does* have a clear electoral strategy, unlike, for example, the Occupy movement elsewhere.

And while the Greek situation is exceptional at some level, it offers lessons and inspiration for unifying the disparate European Left. Radical party building, across Europe, is on the rise, not just in Greece, but also including, for example, the Front de Gauche in France, and Die Linke in Germany.

The ETUC

While Greece has sent shockwaves through European social movements, it has not affected the trade unions in the same way. Despite the ETUC organising more Europe-wide ‘days of action’ since the crisis began, all mobilised fewer than half a million workers, and those who take part are back to work the next day. Spanish unions have seriously engaged with the days of action, but seem isolated, according to Vasco Pedrina from Switzerland.

Why should the ETUC respond to the Greek situation? Because it reflects an attack on all trade unions. Indeed, many of the 17 Eurozone countries have been forced to destroy their collective bargaining systems, with another six countries signing the ‘sixpack’ reforms, which comprise of attacks on collective bargaining freedom.

Karoly Gyorgy of the National Confederation of Trade Unions in Hungary has been involved in the ETUC since 1993. However, he believes it is too focused on being an unequal partner in the institutionalised ‘social dialogue’. The ETUC’s response to austerity must be more than just demanding the inclusion of a social clause in the EU Treaty. Though the ETUC exists to represent its affiliates’ interests at the European Union level, the reality is that trade has been globalised while trade unions remain in national frameworks. Gyorgy believes the ETUC resorts to ‘lowest common denominator’

politics in order to mediate between very different national trade union centres – like a chain, “*the weakest part determines its overall strength*”. Coordinated industrial action may not therefore come through the ETUC.

Nonetheless, positive signs of resistance at European level can be seen. In May 2011, 82 union confederations rejected the Europact at the ETUC Congress – the first time such a large number of unions has voted to rebuke the Commission, explained Anne Dufresne (Fonds National de la Recherche Scientifique - Belgium).

Organising solidarity at the grassroots is needed, but difficult. “*Would we be able to rally European workers to the Greek case?*”, she wondered.

Beyond the ETUC

Recent initiatives *have* begun to develop European trade unionism. The Joint Social Conference is a coalition of 30 unions and social movement organisations formed in 2008. It gathers before the EU Spring Summit each year where EU leaders announce their social and economic priorities, to argue for an alternative social and political agenda.

Another example of alternative organising comes from the workers of ArcelorMittall, a multinational metals company. When the bosses in Liege, Belgium, announced plans to close eight plants in 2011, workers formed a European delegation calling for a Europe-wide company strike – a very different organising structure to the traditional European Works Council.

Trade unionists may have to work outside the formal structures such as the ETUC to build much-needed anti-austerity solidarity. Radical party building, like in Greece, and new organisational forms, as in the case of ArcelorMittall, are crucial.

Vasco Pedrina, **'The European Trade Union Movement: Between National Isolationism and a European Counter-Offensive'**, 2012, at: www.globallabour.info/en/2012/05/the_european_trade_union_movem.html
Joint Social Conference: www.jointsocialconference.eu
"We are at war. What will save us is unity"

In the discussion group led by Khalid Mahmood of the Labour Education Foundation in Pakistan, participants also looked at the European political and economic crises, especially in Greece, and what this means for building a movement of resistance in Europe, as well as the relationship of this to the rest of the world.

Umberto Bandiera from Unia in Switzerland began the discussion by outlining that, for him, Lefteris Kretsos' presentation on the crisis in Greece made it very clear that the discussion should not just be about a Greek or European crisis, but that this is a global economic and social crisis. In the last 15 years, the European financial system has played a key strategic role in the global arena. Bandiera asserted that unions can play a strategic role in the creation of a new economic model in Europe, but that we have to take a strong position in doing this.

"As the financial crisis has taken hold, employers in Europe have taken the opportunity to divert work to other places in the globe", said Mahf Khan of Unite in the UK. Other countries across the globe have benefited from an influx of work, but those employers are still exploiting workers. With regard to the issue of Global Unions being dominated by European countries, Khan felt that the GUFs have to wake up to the fact that, in order to survive and operate successfully and effectively in the future, they have to begin to operate on a global level in realising the size and scope for membership and activism with countries in the global South.

Josua Mata from the Alliance of Progressive Labor in the Philippines stated that workers' movements have had experiences, particularly in Latin America, where huge

protests have brought about new governments but we have also seen violent confrontations between new governments and the people that have brought them to power. How can Syriza avoid this in Greece, as party politics is so different to social politics? In elections, votes are key and ideologies can often be forgotten. Is there any conscious effort to try to learn from Latin American mistakes in this regard?

Lefteris Kretsos felt that the biggest nightmare for Syriza would be to become a bureaucratic, socio-democratic party and stressed the importance of keeping the memory fresh within the party of creating a radical alternative. We have to make people understand there is an alternative and that there is money to sustain the alternative. *“I imagine for Syriza to meet expectations, they would have to take illegal actions that would not be allowed by EU laws”*, said Mata. *“If I was in Syriza’s position, I wouldn’t know what to do.”*

Kretsos felt that this was really a matter of providing the right information to people. We only hear from countries such as Germany and France. Greece received about 120 billion Euros in a financial bailout, but only a small amount actually stayed in Greece. It wasn’t a bailout for Greece, it was a bailout of the banks. The governments who provide the bailout ask for huge measures in return for this money and this creates enemies in Europe, not solidarity.

Dave Spooner of GLI UK said that the whole purpose of the Summer School is to debate and discover what are the politics of the trade union movement. *“Had I been a Greek trade unionist, I would have seen the Greek election result as huge victory”*, he said. As trade unionists, we should always want to be in opposition. *“Our new role as a trade union movement is to get justice through taxation, blocking fiscal union, and by building our own economy”*, said Kretsos. Every economy has its own assets and opportunities. If we don’t stop the drive for austerity, we will become like Mexico where unions are dead and gangs thrive.

Miguel Martinez Lucio from the Manchester Business School felt that one of the main questions for the future of the movement is: do you work within the existing structures of economics and politics? The European trade union movement is a myth in Brussels. Should we look to existing structures, or create new movements? There haven't been dialogues between social democrats across Europe on the financial and social crises. We are paying the price of the capitalist onslaught and the pieces haven't yet been put together.

Kretsos agreed that there appears to be a crisis of social democracy in Europe and conversely a rise in right-wing extremism. *"Society itself will create a radical alternative, but if the Left doesn't take the opportunity, it could be a rise in the radical and extremist Right that we see"*. Bandiera felt that resistance is the first step to combating the crisis. *"Social democratic models are good in peace times, but we are in a war"*, he said.

Kretsos emphasised that there is no more time or room to deliberate on the next actions, and now it comes down to a matter of unity in the movement. *"We need a platform and an idea that will unite different groups and parties within the movement"*, he said. It was agreed that anti-austerity could be the idea to focus on. *"There is no contemplation when it comes to bailing out the banks, but we contemplate too much on the actions we should take."*

Mahmood asked if there was a party or movement anywhere else in Europe like Syriza. The group discussed that there are small socialist groupings and parties, but nothing to the same scale as Syriza. Spooner stated that the only groups standing up for working people in Europe are trade unions. Sam Goldsmith from the UK union RMT highlighted that when we look at the attempts of people to form alliances, these have most often collapsed. He felt that trade unions in the

UK form alliances with the Labour Party because there is no alternative.

Ahmed Elgenedy from FES in Egypt outlined the situation in his country: *“The political map in Egypt is very confusing. There are 53 parties, 350 trade unions, yet we are not able to define a clear structure nor able to create alliance with trade union movements.”* Elgenedy said that the founding of the political structure in Egypt is at the initial stages and wondered whether the country could take experiences and models from Europe.

Mahmood summarised that the group’s discussion had focussed on the crisis of the labour movement in Europe and the need to sustain a politics of resistance within the Left. This would be a key theme of discussions and plenary throughout the week.

Only a ‘Marginal’ Response

Such was the interest in Greece and international union solidarity with the movement there that Kretsos was asked to explore it further with participants in a later session.

The situation in Greece is highly volatile, he said. More than 20,000 people are homeless. Over 50% of young people and a fifth of the population are unemployed. At least 60,000 small companies have closed, and workers are going unpaid for long periods of time. There have been thousands of suicides since 2010. It is a *“messy reality”*, and it fundamentally affects trade union strategies.



ΣΥΡΙΖΑ

Strike, protest, occupy and vote have rightly been the Left’s response, leading to the *“meteoric”* rise of Syriza, the radical left coalition of 12 political currents and the *“main agent of the anti-austerity struggle in Greece”*. Radical unionism is emerging in urban areas like Athens and Thessalonica, while unions affiliated to Syriza are growing in number. The political balance of power in Greece is

being transformed. A Syriza victory would boost the confidence of anti-austerity activists, parties and unions from across Europe.

Yet European trade union solidarity has been marginal. Why? One reason may be a lack of contact with the movement outside Greece, both before and after the austerity programme began. Many European trade unionists, Dave Spooner (GLI Manchester) said, have had *“little or no sustained contact with Greek trade union activists”*, partly due to linguistic and ideological barriers - a significant obstacle in building strong European solidarity.

Left parties across the continent are growing – in Romania, Bulgaria, Greece and elsewhere. Where the ETUC is failing to develop a strategy outside of days of action, these parties are filling the gap, argued Krastyo Petkov from Bulgaria. Indeed Syriza’s main achievement is not only its monumental rise, but its wiping away of the dominant, now-discredited social democratic party, Pasok.

Questions do remain about Syriza, however. If it wins power, how will the European labour movement react? Will Syriza be able to fight and defend its agenda? A confrontational response to a left victory is likely - both recent elections happened in a ‘climate of terrorism’, the right claiming that if Syriza is elected, Greece will immediately go bankrupt.

Syriza is extremely popular to most frustrated and dynamic groups in the population (urban and working class areas, young people, precarious workers) due to its anti-austerity agenda, to its strong presence in street politics, in social media and in grassroots community action, and to the charismatic leadership of 38 year-old Alexis Tsipras. Optimism may be in short supply across the country, but anxiety and anger are not. You cannot really tell which spark will start a fire and, as Government and the ‘Troika’ (the European Commission, International Monetary Fund, and European Central Bank who now determine Greek economic policy) continue to tighten the screws, the anti-austerity movement lead by Syriza is there to fight.

With the situation in Greece as it is, *“even the best document of the ITUC cannot help”*. European resistance movements have to look outside these structures; the massive change needed must come from below, insisted Petkov. However, most national-level trade unions are having to act as *“fire-fighters to the flames of authoritarianism and neo-fascism”*, in the face of far-right movements like Golden Dawn in Greece and elsewhere.

A ‘crisis of imagination’

An important point raised during the session is that economic governance of the situation in Greece has changed economic decision-making in Europe as a whole. The European Commission has now become the sole decision-maker, able to select the policies, whilst the European Parliament and Council have only the right to comment. What is more, the Fiscal Pact, tabled by the Commission, contains a binding austerity mechanism in response to unhealthy levels of debt. This ‘debt brake’ will possess a “binding and eternal validity”, according to German chancellor, Angela Merkel. This will permanently enshrine neoliberalism and austerity in European fiscal policy.

Indeed, *“the economic crisis is not peculiarly Greek - the crisis in the Eurozone is one of global capitalism”*, said Peter Rossman of the IUF. The only thing different about the austerity programme being imposed on Europe is that *“it’s happening to white people”* in the centre of the Continent. The prelude to Greece was Latvia, but no one took any notice then.

Sadly, the ETUC’s strategic response to European austerity has been the publication of the *“hugely inadequate”* ‘Athens Manifesto’. As the crisis persists and deepens, Rossman feels there is at the same time a *“crisis of imagination”* on the Left. The fundamental issue is one of control – governments have refused to intervene in the operations of the banks they are bailing out and even nationalising. *“We bail out banks not people; why are we not demanding that the banks be subject to public oversight and control and run as public utilities? Bailout money for Greece goes directly to European banks*

at a time when Greek hospitals can't pay for medicine. At the same time, non-financial corporations in the USA, Eurozone, UK and Japan are sitting on a pile of un-invested surplus cash estimated at US\$7.75 trillion – an unprecedented 'investment strike'."

Kretsos summarised by challenging the political cowardice of the European trade union movement: *"If not us, who?"* Radicalisation is taking place on both sides. If unions do not offer a positive vision, it may not be our side which wins.

In fact, the outcome of the struggle in Greece is likely to shape the renewal of the labour movement not just in Europe but worldwide. There is a strong need for trade union solidarity with Greece, not just across Europe but globally, he said.

What should be the future for the ETUC?

Plamen Dimitrov is President of the Confederation of Independent Trade Unions of Bulgaria (KNSB), and a member of the GLI Advisory Board. His is a trade union movement which has gone through the transition from an authoritarian regime to a so-called 'free-market' economy. He outlined his ideas for how the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) could be better responding to the situation in Europe.



Europe today is facing austerity measures, a financial and social crisis, deregulatory measures, pressures on wages and conditions and attacks on social and trade union rights. A new governance is developing at the European Union (EU) level, one that is much more liberal than before. As a result, tensions between EU institutions and the European trade unions are growing.

So, there is a need to change or adapt the trade union priorities, strategies and activities at national and European level. And we need to ask ourselves whether the union movement at those levels,

including the ETUC, is out of touch with the political mood of European workers on the ground.

There are three current political trends in Europe, Dimitriov said, that all express a growing desire for an alternative to neo-liberalism. First, the far-left, but also the far-right (populist and nationalist), are radicalised. Second, new social movements are emerging. Third, a growing anti-capitalist mood is taking root. In this context, there are two questions which we must ask about the ETUC:

- How could the ETUC be better in touch with the political mood of the diverse European trade union membership?
- Is there a need for radical political solutions and a new sense of political direction for the international trade union movement?

The recent policy documents of the ETUC contain positive elements. Support for a Financial Transaction Tax (FTT) is growing and it is a good thing. But the ETUC needs to be more aggressive in its support for demands for a radical transformation of taxation. This should be based on progressive taxation, rather than socially regressive systems such as the flat tax rate. Also, the ETUC should push more for the creation of ‘eurobonds’, funds issued by the Eurozone nations.

The Athens Manifesto, adopted by the ETUC in 2011, is fundamentally a good policy document. The trouble is that the ETUC is not following its own manifesto! The more recent (2012) ‘Social Compact for Europe’ could also be better used to mobilise workers across Europe. We should be defending more clearly collective bargaining as the central tool for creating social justice and redistribution.

So, Dimitrov asked, what scenarios are there for a European trade unionism? Should our option be Loyalty? Voice? Or Exit?

A participant from Switzerland opened the discussion by forcefully arguing that the Athens Manifesto is actually a naïve document, especially if we consider the level of capitalist aggression that workers are experiencing across Europe. It is time for trade unions to take other types of measures. European workers face massive

unemployment. Social dialogue has failed, and there is not any more a European 'social model'. Fascist parties are on the rise in Eastern Europe. We need to send a totally different message. Could we take inspiration from Iceland and refuse to pay the debt? What is at stake is actually the future of democracy. We need to start organising a general strike in Europe!

Another Swiss colleague agreed but cautioned against calling a general strike when the conditions are not ripe. The policy elements in the ETUC manifesto are good. The problem is that this is not a strategic document. We don't just need good policy. We seriously need a strategy.

Currently, there are two conflicting visions expressed in the ETUC, he said. First, there are those who feel that in the face of increasingly neoliberal European Commission, we should 'renationalise' the struggles and use our nation states to protect us from neoliberalism. This is the view generally held by more conservative (and more powerful) unions such as the northern and German ones.

The second view, held by more progressive unions, is that we should instead seek to 'Europeanise' the struggles. Two possibilities exist in the current situation, which could create the conditions for more Europeanised struggles, and eventually lead to a European general strike. First, we should coordinate strikes that take place across Europe. We should try to make them happen at the same time, in the same companies, etc. Second, we should launch a European citizen initiative on social dumping and fundamental social rights, and gather signatures across Europe. Of course, this is a weak instrument, but it would allow us to create pressure across the whole of Europe, over a period of time, part of building a political movement.

Karoly Gyorgy from Hungary said he feels a bit guilty, as he has been involved in the ETUC for almost thirty years. However, he also drew our attention to the fact that the ETUC is *not* a class organisation. It is the lowest common denominator of labour movements across Europe. Furthermore, the ETUC cannot be doing

our work in our stead. We need to go back to our national unions and educate our members.

Trade unions are at risk of ignoring some recent and dangerous developments in European law, argued a researcher from Belgium. She spoke especially of those related to the maximum unit labour cost, which is a direct attack on trade union rights. We should be talking about a minimum European wage, and indeed why not about a minimum *world* wage?

Finally, an experienced colleague cautioned that any kind of action needs to be grounded in the existing, real situation in which we find ourselves. We cannot simply just call for a general strike. We need to create the conditions for one. European ‘days of action’ are indeed not very useful. One day does nothing. In order for actions to be effective, they need to be sustained over time. The proposal for a European Citizens’ Initiative to generate more direct citizen participation in European policy-making, and supported by over 120 European social movements and NGOs, is one tool which could be used to mobilise in a more sustained way across the continent.

ETUC: www.etuc.org

European Citizens’ Initiative: www.citizens-initiative.eu

The impact of the European crisis on the rest of the world?

This discussion group was chaired by Pat Horn of StreetNet International, based in South Africa. It looked at how the European financial crisis is impacting on trade unions outside Europe, and what this means for international solidarity.

The European financial crisis has had a big impact on non-European trade unions. Firstly, there has been a significant decrease in policy, material, financial, and political support from European unions for unions in the rest of the world.

Then there is the impact of the European crisis on their own economies because of the way that the global economy links everyone. New Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) are rapidly being agreed with many African and Asian countries. European trade has already become more aggressive towards Africa during the crisis. India has been massively affected, with a large decrease in exports, badly affecting production in free trade zones (FTZs) there. There is enormous scope for cooperation between trade unions over this issue. Workers' rights are not protected in FTZs and workers need support from their European comrades.

The issue of migration into Europe is also linking non-European trade unions into the European crisis. The majority of domestic workers in Europe are now undocumented migrant workers, for example. So are many workers in agriculture. Xenophobia and hostility towards these migrants into Europe are becoming more prevalent, as workers of the host countries suffer cuts in their salaries, benefits and working conditions, and see the migrants as 'taking their jobs'. So migration can be a divisive issue within the international trade union movement, and needs strategic handling.

What can the global South teach Europe?

There is a growing belief that Europe is no longer leading the global labour movement. Latin America, South Asia, and Southeast Asia are increasingly leading on policy. Yet European unions and the ETUC still attempt to control non-European trade unions through their technical experience and finances. The global South increasingly controls the means of production, but the importance of the unions there is not sufficiently recognised by the European labour movement. The disjunction between technical control and ideological unity is a major problem for the global labour movement.

A discussion is needed about the migration dynamics outside the EU as a model for dealing with the problems facing European economies. The Korean model of inter-trade union migration, in which discussions are held between unions in host and sending countries, is a good example of a model that could be exported.

The issue of ‘informal’ workers is also a new major one for many European trade unions. Unions in the global South have more experience in this area, which could be shared with their European comrades.

The crisis has also exposed a lack of connection between union leadership and membership in Europe. There is a growing ideological rift between the militant grassroots and the relatively passive leadership in many countries. In some countries, such as Greece, grassroots organisation has emerged to fill the void in effective leadership, with forty-five new unions being created since the crisis began. The South has decades of experience in this area, and ideas must be shared between unions.

Nor has there been a particularly coherent response from the labour movement at the core of the European economy. The ETUC has been largely inactive, and this could be attributed to it being dependent on funding from the European Commission. The European labour movement needs a renewed political focus based on activist independence without a reliance on existing governmental structures, a process that has been underway in much of the global South for many years.

Greater examination of neoliberal organisations and structures, both in Europe and around the world, is needed. There seems a lack of ideological introspection. Where is the discussion about the possibility of returning to Keynesianism economics to replace neoliberalism?

Whilst the non-European labour movement is leading the way in building internationalism and solidarity, some participants said that European trade unionism seems beset by ‘isolationism’, seeing issues within its borders, separate from the wider world. This is a divisive approach encouraging divisions between eastern and western Europe, EU members and non-EU members, and European nations and non-European nations. International solidarity must be at the forefront of

both the European and global recovery, and must be led by workers around the world, not just in Europe.

Unions & Authoritarianism

Central/Eastern Europe needs “Perestroika from inside”

Prof. **Krastyo Petkov** was one of the founders of the Confederation of Independent Trade Unions of Bulgaria (KNSB). He spoke about the growing authoritarianism in Central and Eastern Europe, and his views on how the union movement should be responding.

After all the upheavals of the late 1980s and early 1990s that ended Communist rule in the region, Central and Eastern Europe once again faces a shift towards authoritarian regimes. This is not only the case in Petkov’s own country, but in fifteen other ones there too, he said.

The ongoing economic crisis creates the perfect conditions for this spread of authoritarian regimes, who use the mantra that ‘strong power creates better economies’, with some political success. Alongside the crisis, and the disappointment and anger that come from it, these regimes are also born out of ethnic and nationalist conflicts, the on-going power of certain oligarchies, and charismatic personality politics – and they find support in global neoliberal networks.

Petkov said the authoritarianism of today is different from the totalitarianism of the past. Today, there is more of an emphasis upon charisma and the leader as an individual. Power is not directed towards the public sphere, but is of a private and personal nature. Authoritarian regimes tend to lack a governing ideology and have only a limited acceptance of pluralism. The legitimacy of these governments and leaders is achieved not through the law and other legal means, but through charisma.

The actual model of authoritarianism varies between the different countries. In the case of Hungary, Bulgaria, and Georgia, for

example, the regime was actually elected through free elections, though afterwards they changed the laws to guarantee their own success in future elections. Common features, however, include: coercive powers, corruption, anti-trade union politics, an oligarchic social structure, an absence of ideology, extreme neoliberalism, and the lack of a free media.

The rise of these regimes poses a great danger for trade unions, who themselves are experiencing a period of crisis in these countries. The unions are caught between their past positions, and the difficulties of establishing completely new and alternative structures for worker representation.

Meanwhile, there are nascent union-like networks of self-employed, informal and entrepreneurial workers, and social and protest movements. But these groups have specific, primarily social demands, and they protest separately on the streets. They are not unified and lack any real mass presence. Petkov calls it “*syndicalism without syndicates*”.

Given that these forms of opposition that currently exist are inadequate, what are the alternatives? For Petkov, the unions need to be part of building a ‘social movement’, linking with the disparate protest groups. “*Never mind whether these people are members of unions*”, he said. “*If there are social demands, we (trade unions) have to join with them*”. The trade unions should reject “*the old dogma that they don’t pay fees, are not our members*”, and so on. Actually, some of these movements as yet do not want trade unions involved in their struggles, seeing them as part of the establishment, similar to the scepticism about unions by networks such as Occupy elsewhere. So, this is something that needs to change, if strategic alliances with protest movements, and new forms of civil and community unionism are to be built.

Trade unions can and should also take internal steps to adapt to the contemporary situation. In Petkov’s view, new waves of politicisation and action from below are necessary to ‘change the system’, a kind of “*perestroika from inside*” the unions. He gave the

example of the FNV trade union federation in the Netherlands which recently underwent a complete transformation process to rebuild a new movement, following major internal policy splits.

Trade unions do face a dilemma between being politically independent or getting actively involved. But the latter cannot merely mean creating a labour party - trade unions must assume a role as 'something else' other than this.

Petkov outlined the dangers facing the trade union movement if it does not respond adequately to the current situation in Central and Eastern Europe:

- A lack of identity, if unions fail to carve out a distinctive position for themselves; in many countries, they are seen as simply 'part of the system'.
- Marginalisation and alienation: in Macedonia, unions are completely rejected by protest movements.
- Dependency on relations with the powers-that-be; in Hungary, the Government decides which unions should be invited to negotiate at a national level.
- Support for personal or paternalistic politics: in Bulgaria, the Prime Minister foisted himself into the public eye as the supposed 'leader' of a strike of metal workers; the workers came to admire him like a 'God', promising him 99% of their votes in forthcoming elections; something similar is happening in Azerbaijan.

As a result of such problems, unions in the region are suffering from a shrinking and only 'symbolic' membership.

Unions must not just leave the critique of European economic policies to economists. They, and their own networks of experts, must occupy a leading role in speaking out against austerity and neoliberal capitalism, and provide economic and political alternatives, he said.

Recapturing Labour Democracy?

Vasyl Andreyev of the Construction Workers' Union in Ukraine led a discussion on the state of trade unionism in Central and Eastern Europe in the face of austerity and repression.

For Karoly Gyorgy of the National Confederation of Trade Unions in Hungary, the change in regimes following the USSR's demise, caused a huge decline in solidarity. *"In twenty years, we still have not found it again"*, he said. Without solidarity, unions struggle to *"raise members to their feet"*. Moreover, the political class offers no alternatives to free-market capitalism. *"They have all been socialised in the same regime"*. Unfortunately for trade unionists in Hungary, much of the non-print media is dominated by the right-wing government, and most of the population do not read the less-censored printed media, limiting the Left's possible reach outside of the (still not universally used) Internet.

Shifting to the free-market, said Plamen Dimitrov of the Confederation of Independent Trade Unions in Bulgaria, *"was called democratisation...But it is capitalistic society – it means injustice"*. Instead of seeing much-promised competition, new oligarchies have emerged.

And now there is austerity. Since it began, workers have faced huge attacks across Eastern and Central Europe on pensions, pay, conditions and labour rights. There are also huge attacks on trade union rights as governments clamp down on opposition to neo-liberal reforms.

A case in point are the criminal investigations into trade unions and their leaders in Ukraine from 2005-2010. For Andreyev, the hardest year in the Ukraine was 2010 when the Government announced harsh pension legislation. After waves of protests, and with tension between unions and the Government rising, a number of union leaders were called in by prosecutors and asked to inform on their own activists and activities, in contravention of ILO Conventions 87 and 98 which give all workers everywhere the right to organise

freely. Legislation on ‘social dialogue’ was eventually passed, but it is weak. However, what the protests did do is increase the unity of the movement.

Meanwhile, the situation in Russia is dire. Organisations with international connections or funding are now classed ‘foreign agents’ – obviously aimed at restricting the ability of Russian unions to exercise international solidarity. In addition, proactive organising is now classified as extremist activity - criminalising basic collective action.

Workers are responding, however. The 2011/12 oil workers’ strike in Western Kazakhstan lasted longer than 6 months and at its peak involved more than 20,000 strikers.

Many of the attacks come from rightist governments such as that in Hungary under Prime Minister Viktor Orbán. Yet the repressive labour code being introduced there (which Gyorgy believes violates ILO Conventions) was conceived under the Socialist Government two years before. Unions in Central and Eastern Europe are not immune from attacks from the mainstream ‘Left’. *“We need a new alternative policy mix”*, said Plamen Dimitrov. *“The Socialist Party isn’t going to deliver this”*. Perhaps unions can.

Active, democratic, unions can boost public trust. Public opinion of trade unions in Hungary before the crisis was highly negative. Now, Gyorgy joked, *“We rank higher than Parliament, Government, employers and churches – though we’re still at the very bottom!”* Meanwhile the EU is doing little: *“When basic values are violated, the EU is unable to act”*.

Next Steps

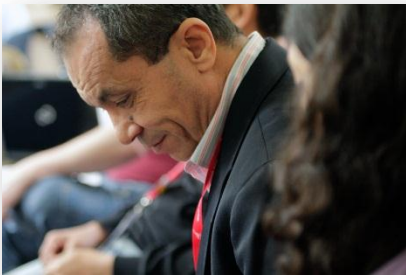
Unions in the former Soviet countries must stop talking about ‘new’ and ‘old’ (i.e. Soviet style) trade unions, and instead talk about ‘good’ or ‘bad’ ones, said Gyorgy.

Social democracy, tainted by its support for austerity, may well not be up to the challenge. Now more than ever, unions must fight, even though governments are realising that unions offer the strongest source of resistance to austerity and repression, and are legislating against them accordingly.

It is true that unions have not fully recovered from the decline in solidarity following the collapse of the USSR. This decline is strongest amongst the young, raised in free-market principles. So, grassroots internal democracy is vital. Such union democratisation, as well as working with social movements like ‘Occupy’, and developing what Dimitrov called the ‘alternative policy mix’ may help engage these young people.

Instead of being the ‘*subject* of politics’ unions must ‘create our own political initiative’, concluded Gyorgy.

Unions after the Arab Spring – the case of Egypt



Kamal Abbas is from the Centre for Trade Union and Workers’ Services (CTUWS) in Egypt. After giving some of the history of trade unionism in Egypt, he focused on the 2011 Revolution there and the current situation for the independent trade unions.

First of all, though, Abbas began by sharing his criticism of the Socialist International (SI). The party of former President Ben Ali, ousted by the first popular uprising of the Arab Spring in Tunisia in 2011, was a member of it. So was the party of former President Hosni Mubarak toppled in Egypt later the same year. The SI actually trained Mubarak, he noted. This shows the political weaknesses in how the international labour movement has historically related to the Arab region.

Trade unions were developed in Egypt by southern European immigrant workers at the end of the 19th century. There have been independent democratic trade unions since the beginning of the 20th century. The first significant blow to them came from the military coup in 1952. As President Nasser came to power, he developed a very populist rhetoric, but striking workers were put in jail from the very beginning of his rule. In 1957, Nasser nationalised the trade unions and turned them into an official union, which became governmental and corrupt. It still exists today.

In the 1970s, a new labour movement arose, demanding the right to organise independently. So the Revolution in Egypt of 2011 did not take place in a void. Since 2006, more than 300 strikes have taken place, involving over 2 million workers. It was, he said, the workers who taught the Egyptian people how to revolt!

The new regime established after the Revolution has not been answering the demands of the workers, however. First, workers are asking for better wages and retirement benefits, and there are on-going strikes about this. The second demand is for an independent trade union movement. The Supreme Council of the Armed Forces still holds tight control over much of Egyptian society. Following the Revolution, it refused to ratify a draft law on freedom of association for workers. So, the old laws, which are still in place, make it compulsory for all workers to belong to the existing official unions. Also, parties based on 'sectoral' interests are banned, making it difficult for independent unions to organise politically.



The Egyptian Revolution has not automatically benefited the Left

So, the new independent trade unions have to exist alongside the old governmental ones, and have to fight to be legally allowed to collect membership fees. That is not to say that political organisation isn't happening. The Egyptian Social Democratic Party is organising, and

is similar to most social democratic parties in Europe. There are also more socialist-oriented parties such as the Socialist Popular Alliance Party. Attempts to form a Trotskyist labour party have failed.

There was a Left presence in the Presidential elections. The socialist Hamdeen Sabahi came third in the first round, but a divided Left was unable to confront the highly organised Muslim Brotherhood candidate, Mohamed Morsi. During the election period, independent unions were preoccupied with wage struggles and did not develop a collective political strategy. Nonetheless, most trade unionists, said Abbas, voted for Sabahi.

A political strategy is vital to building the labour movement in Egypt. This means defending the civil and secular nature of the state, and therefore opposing the Muslim Brotherhood. With 600,000 members and a great deal of money, the Brotherhood represents a reactionary challenge to the Left. However, the Brotherhood is not as strong as is commonly portrayed in Western media. Votes for Islamists fell by 50% compared to the Parliamentary elections in 2011. It was a split in the progressive vote that allowed Morsi to succeed.

Now Egypt is in a state of power struggle between Islamists and the military, and the labour movement has to struggle against both – *“they’re both as autocratic as each other”*. Meanwhile, with a dozen leaders and a dozen main ideas, the labour movement is in dispute over minor differences rather than taking concerted action.

Abbas’ Centre, the CTUWS, has been building links between the new independent Egyptian trade unions and the international trade union movement since even before the Revolution. *“We have been receiving concrete support since 2004, and joining the International Federation of Workers Education Associations (IFWEA) was a big help”*, he said. *“Support from the ITUC has been of two kinds. First, it has refused to recognise the official governmental trade union federation. Second, it has constantly drawn the attention to the situation of workers in Egypt.”*

However the Revolution raises one important question for the international trade union movement: how is it going to deal with the new Egyptian trade unions? How can these unions be helped through international trade union solidarity? After the Revolution quite a lot of money has flowed in to support the new Egyptian unions. *“We are now in the position to reflect on the use of this money”,* he said. *“Has it been used efficiently? Did we really need all those training seminars in fancy hotels? Would it not have been more useful to invest in the long-term sustainability of the new unions? We are now at a turning point and need to reflect on the future.”*

Discussion Points

In the discussion that followed, Abbas was asked to explain more about the attitude towards trade unions of the Muslim Brotherhood which now runs the Government in Egypt. He replied that the Brotherhood has always been strongly anti-union. They have never been members of independent trade unions, and have actually never fought a struggle around labour issues. They have even cracked down on students and workers uprisings! Their strategic goal in relation to trade unions is, in fact, to take over the institutions and assets of the former governmental unions. Hence, they are not ready to recognise the new trade unions which would be competitors. This is why the Muslim Brotherhood is blocking legislation which would help new trade unions to collect membership fees. Furthermore, the Muslim Brotherhood has an anti-union ideology, and a strong neoliberal agenda. They want charity not empowerment. Their rhetoric is a mixture of populism and neoliberalism.

A participant from Russia reflected that this is similar to experiences in his country 20 years ago, when his union was in the same process of transition from an authoritarian regime. But 20 years later, we can see that authoritarianism is on the verge of returning in Europe. So, what have we done wrong as trade unions? For him, the role of the ETUC and ITUC has not been a good one. In Kazakhstan, for instance, huge strikes have been going on for eight months and very violently repressed by the State. Strike leaders have been imprisoned. However, there has been absolutely no response from the

international labour movement. Indeed, the ITUC was in Kazakhstan at the same time to discuss the recognition of the official trade union movement, and didn't even raise the issue.

A colleague from Hungary added that, looking back on his own experience of transition out of authoritarianism, their biggest mistake was to spend too much time fighting the other trade union federations. Rather they should have taken over the existing former official trade union structure and democratised it. This might be a lesson for others, he thought.

China – Has the International Democratic Trade Union Movement Lost the Plot?



Elizabeth Tang is former Chief Executive of the Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions (HKCTU). These days she is the International Coordinator of the International Domestic Workers Network (IDWN). Her union, the HKCTU, is the only independent trade union organisation in China. It was formed in 1990 with the assistance of the IUF global union federation, a product of international solidarity and independent trade unionism

In mainland China, the trade unions are organised under the All China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU). The ACFTU is the largest union in the world, with over 226 million members in 2010, and is part of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). It emerged because of the Party and Government's need to contain workers' activism. Today, it is the only body that can engage in collective bargaining on behalf of the workers.

A push for organisation and recruitment led to its rapid growth after 1999. By 2006, the ACFTU forced through a labour contract law, guaranteeing employees a permanent contract after 9 years working for an employer, preventing the long-term casualisation of work.

This is widely regarded by the international trade union movement as a landmark achievement.

This shift after 1999 is attributed to the labour market transformation that took place in China in the 1990s. The collapse of state-owned enterprises led to the loss of around 70 million members, meaning that the ACFTU could no longer rely on permanent workers in state-owned enterprises. Meanwhile, there was a massive increase in migrant workers from the rural areas into jobs in the new industries. In 2000, the CCP called on the ACFTU to organise this changing workforce. By 2005, China's President Hu Jintao had told the ACFTU to organise the employees of the Fortune 500 'super-corporations' in the country.

The increase in labour disputes in the last decade was also a key factor that caused the change in the ACFTU. Thousands of workers were and are engaged in industrial action every day in China.

The organisation of the US retail giant Walmart in China is significant because it was the only case where the ACFTU organised from the bottom-up. Starting in a single store in Fujian, workers organised themselves and registered their union. Initially Walmart resisted but, after the ACFTU held discussions with the corporation, an agreement was reached. An 8% wage increase was immediately negotiated, and within 2 years all 140 stores were unionised. However, soon afterwards, the ACFTU took control of the negotiations and imposed its own collective agreement. The grassroots leadership was gradually removed by the ACFTU and the top-down model was forced upon the membership.

In China, unions are enterprise-based, rather than industry-based. Agreements affect all sites within each company. The ACFTU is heavily dependent on companies and employers for its finances, including the Chairmen of the ACFTU at branch level who are still paid by the companies. This has created a strong relationship between the union leadership and the employers, preventing the workers' interests from being the priority of the union.

The ACFTU is now trying to strengthen wage bargaining by creating a framework for workers to negotiate over wages. The Party also wants to strengthen the position of the ACFTU and maintain its role as the sole representative of workers' interests during negotiations.

Despite its superficial commitments to workers and their rights, the ACFTU remains firmly within the structure of the party-state. Strikes and freedom of association are prohibited as they disrupt production and the economy. In a recent attack on the right to freedom of association, in May 2012, a state-controlled NGO federation was created in Guangdong province, and the following month four labour activists from Hong Kong labour NGOs were taken to a police station for interrogation. The strengthening of the ACFTU and the creation of the NGO federation should be seen as part of the determination to wipe out democratic and genuine labour organisation in China.

Internationally, the trade union movement has not recognised the ACFTU as an independent trade union. However, there is a growing dialogue and engagement with it. There are frequent bilateral meetings and exchanges, such as joint workshops with the ACFTU on collective bargaining, social security coverage, workers' education, gender equality, and decent work.

In 2003, at an international conference on labour rights in China, the ITUC (then the ICFTU) acknowledged the growing trend of contact with the ACFTU and recognised the need for affiliates and GUFs to be properly informed about the nature of the organisation. Although it pledged to raise awareness about the activities of the ACFTU, and to critically review the impact of the organisation, there has so far been no concrete progress on these commitments.

Meanwhile, the HKCTU has been supporting labour rights in mainland China through activities such as education and training of workers and activists there. It also takes an active role in disseminating information, locally and globally, on the labour rights situation in China. Every year, its members participate in the annual

vigil in Hong Kong to commemorate the massacre of pro-democracy activists in Tiananmen Square in Beijing in 1989.

For trade unions elsewhere in the world to see the ACFTU as a partner or a legitimate counterpart is fraught with difficulties, Tang said. Such contacts can be used as propaganda by the ACFTU, and may also alienate workers inside China who look to the international labour movement to support independent trade unionism. Rather than befriending a union which is essentially part of the Chinese Government, the international labour movement should prioritise alternative avenues for supporting Chinese workers, she advised.

Democratic Unions in Asia

A discussion group looked at the transition to democracy in Asia over recent decades, and its impact on union development. First there were brief presentations from three countries: South Korea, Pakistan and the Philippines. There followed a discussion about how to build better international solidarity between workers, especially to combat the racism and xenophobia that is growing in this era of ‘austerity’.

South Korea

An Joong-Un is an organiser with the Korean Federation of Construction Industry Trade Unions, which is an affiliate of the Building & Woodworkers International (BWI). He spoke about how democratic unions have developed in South Korea.

At the end of the Second World War, when Korea was released from the Japanese empire, the country was divided into two – North and South – and a vicious war raged between them for five years. In the South, a dictatorship ruled for 40 years, killing and arresting many union activists. Long working hours and low wages were the standard.

In 1975, at the age of just 22, a garment worker named Chun Tae-II burnt himself to death in protest at the appalling conditions in the factories. The news spread widely. Students started to help organise

the workers. A decade later, millions of people took to the streets to end the military government and for democratic elections. Democratic unions grew massively, in alliance with students, farmers, and NGOs. One million were organised in one year alone in the late 1980s within the new Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU).

A decade on, in 1997, economic crisis hit Asia, including South Korea. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) imposed new policies on the country, to favour foreign investors: privatisation, the free flow of finance across borders, and new labour relations. Many lost their jobs. Others suffered lower wages and conditions. To protect the jobs and welfare of those still in work, company-based unions were formed. But the informal workforce was growing, as companies more and more contracted out their operations, and employed more on temporary contracts, as ‘trainees’, etc. Workers with formal jobs were only about 10% of the workforce, and so unions representing only them became weaker.

The KCTU needed to change. Over the past ten years, it has shifted to industry-based unions, and to include more informal workers such as those in construction and transport. It has also stayed active politics, helping to found a new political party, the Unified Progressive Party. So now there is political democracy, but not yet economic democracy.

There is a small number of very rich South Korean global companies – Samsung, Hyundai, LG, etc. – and they use the labour of mostly informal workers. Many young workers in South Korea today get only about 8,000 won (US\$7) a day: they are called the ‘8,000 Generation’. A couple of years ago the Hanjin shipbuilding company fired 2,000 workers to move to the Philippines. A woman worker, Kim Jinsuk, occupied a giant crane in the shipyard for several hundred days, communicating with the world by Twitter. Many came in solidarity, roping themselves to the cranes.

<http://storify.com/wjsfree/south-korean-ship-yard-battle-continues>

The KCTU is now preparing for a general strike to demand a change in labour law, against these neo-liberal policies. *“We are saying that we are all workers, formal and informal, together. We are remembering Chun Tae-Il who burnt himself to death. He had a job and wages, but he gave his life for others”*, said An Joong-Un.

Korean Confederation of Trade Unions: <http://kctu.org>

Pakistan

The Labour Education Foundation was set up in 1993 by trade union leaders, human rights and women’s rights activists in Pakistan to help workers to organise themselves and fight for their rights. It has offices in the cities of Lahore, Karachi and Mardan. **Khalid Mahmood** is LEF’s Executive Director.



After the 1947 division that created India and Pakistan, there were different political landscapes between the two nations. India developed more progressive, democratic political leaders, while Pakistan’s rulers remained very feudal, based on their ownership of land. No big industries were set up. Only the railways and a few small industries had trade unions.

For over 35 years, Pakistan was ruled by military dictatorships. From the late 1960s to late 1970s there were political movements led by students and unions.

Eventually the military government was thrown out, to be replaced by the socialist slogans of the Bhutto regime. However, he was from a feudal family and had no will for land reform. Then it was back to military rule. In the late 1970s, the Pakistani military government was useful for US intervention, then supporting the Mujahideen to fight the Soviets who were occupying neighbouring Afghanistan. Union and student movements were banned. Then came 9/11, and

Pakistan became part of US strategy of war and occupation in Afghanistan and Iraq.

“So, unions as democratic institutions have no roots in Pakistan, because we have no democratic history or space”, Khalid said. Of the 48 million-strong workforce, only 2.5% are in unions, and fewer than 1% covered by collective bargaining agreements. Most who are in unions, are in the public sector.

“By law, our unions are at factory-level, and they are very much dominated by an old-guard leadership. The big public sector unions do not have good grassroots structures. Now LEF is working with non-organised workers in factories as well as informal workers, to build their organisations.”

One example is the power-loom textile workers of Faisalabad in the Punjab. There are about half a million of them. They are organised at neighbourhood level, within what they call a ‘national labour movement’ rather than a ‘union’ as such. They negotiate with the district administration and the employers’ board (rather than individual employers), and have been successful in winning and implementing an above-minimum wage. They have a central office with four full-time officers, plus field offices and organisers on motorbikes, with a system for collecting membership dues. Their tactics include occupying factories and streets, to put pressure on the local administration and political forces. Power-loom workers are also active politically in the Labour Party of Pakistan, and are supported by left parties. It is a good example of new trade unionism in Pakistan.

In July 2010 the power-loom workers went on strike for a month, and on the final day called on workers to occupy the city centre. Bosses’ gangsters and the police opened fire and 50 workers were injured. The bosses also set fire to a factory and blamed the protesting workers in a pre-designed conspiracy against the workers’ movement. Six were arrested and sentenced under the Anti-Terrorist Act to a total of 590 years. Other political and union activists are being subjected to this Act too. *“We are appealing these cases in the*

High Court but it takes time. Meanwhile, the big union structures are silent”, he added.

Labour Education Foundation, Pakistan: www.lef.org.pk

‘Rise of the Oppressed’: a video of the struggle of the power-loom workers of Faisalabad, Pakistan, by the Labour Education Foundation: www.youtube.com/watch?v=LA0AFOfYDb4

Philippines

Josua Mata is Secretary General of the Alliance of Progressive Labor in the Philippines. His country has experienced democracy for the past twenty years, since they toppled the Marcos dictatorship. But they need to do much more to deepen this democracy, he said.



“We have all the formal rights. The Philippines has signed international civil, human rights, and labour standards, etc. We do have a Labour Code. But all this is hardly enjoyed by workers.

“The early labour movement struggle was intertwined with anti-imperialism, mixed with socialist/anarchist ideals from Spain. Historically, this is why Filipino Governments were scared of unions, and killed and jailed unionists. Then came the EDSA Revolution in 1986 which forced the ruling Marcos family to flee. It was a wonderful experience of political liberation.

“But then we went to sleep, while the elites did not. They put in place a government which would accept the demands of the IMF and World Bank. Now, the unions face an historic low in membership, and there is massive casualisation. The Labour Code that we have is still the one designed by the Marcos regime, and circumscribes our labour rights. This one was kept – the only one not thrown out.

“Also there is a very bad history of splits and left sectarianism in the labour movement. We are good at organising, but bad at keeping together. 90% of workers are in small companies, but the unions focus on the big companies and fight each other for them. We have never developed a culture of true democracy. The unions are still driven by paternalism and machismo.

“After twenty years, we are at last building a broad unity among our ten labour centres. Unions have come to realise that everyone is vulnerable. A famous case was that of some Philippines Airlines workers who were sacked one day, to be replaced the next day by workers employed by an outsourced company owned by the same tycoon, at 50% of the salary. They said ‘No way’ and kept working until police evicted them forcibly. This started a protest movement throughout all the unions. It showed that no-one is safe, not even in a ‘rich’ union.

“So, eight of the ten union centres are now part of a coalition fighting casualisation. Next year, maybe we will even have everyone in the one coalition.”

Alliance of Progressive Labor, Philippines: www.apl.org.ph

Discussion Points

The discussion opened with a question about how unions in Asia can help those in Europe to fight the onslaught they are facing from fascism, riding on the back of islamophobia. How can colleagues in countries with a significant Islamic population work with unions in the North on this?

Ashim Roy from the New Trade Union Initiative (NTUI) in India responded, “*We cannot have democracy in unions without democratisation in society. Unions have to be central to fighting for human rights, not just leave it to others*”. He gave the case of tribal peoples in India who are facing repression. NTUI activists occupied the jail where a tribal leader was imprisoned. Meanwhile, in Kashmir, despite some 2,000 people killed or imprisoned, the unions

never took up pro-democracy activities, and have now collapsed. The NTUI is active there too. Shalini Trivedi added that the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) is also organising women in Kashmir, including Afghani war widows, by giving training to help them build their livelihoods and their organisation.

Another participant said that building democracy has to happen at the grassroots level. New unions cannot simply be a rebirth of old structures. Workers at the community level, particularly young people and women, are very interested and are much more democratic than old men! It is not that we need a democratic society first, before we have strong unions, but rather that it is the unions' task to build democracy from below.

Another suggested that people tend to look to Europe for 'democracy' but, he asked, what kind of democracy is it? In Europe, we have a problem getting our unions to understand and adopt active anti-racism. There is 'scary' talk of the 'failure of multi-cultural society', blaming 'others' for taking jobs. In Europe it is not only the old fascist parties which use this kind of language, but also the social democratic/labour parties. But such 'popular nationalism' only serves to divert our attention away from austerity, to fighting each other. Instead we need to stand together and 'kick upwards'.

Khalid Mahmood agreed that growing fascism in Europe is a result of economic repression, something that we all face. However, direct links between workers in Asia and Europe have not really developed yet. Mostly, those links that do exist are through the Global Union structures, but we need to link and communicate directly with each other, not simply depend on the Global Unions for this. A European colleague agreed, *"I see direct contact/networks/structures from this Summer School as essential."*

"In my union we are 90% Christians and 10% Muslims, and we have to fight prejudice too, time after time, especially when there is an economic crisis.

But this is not our war. Our members have to be fighters for peace."
Josua Mata, Alliance of Progressive Labor, Philippines

Unions and Social Movements for Political and Economic Democracy

This plenary session looked at the new protest movements that have sprung up in the wake of the financial crisis, and what lessons there may be for the way in which trade unions organise to meet the challenges of contemporary capitalism. It brought together three prominent voices from the labour movement: **Steve Early** of 'Labor Notes' (USA), **Pat Horn** of StreetNet International, and **Hilary Wainwright**, Fellow of the Transnational Institute (TNI) and co-editor of the UK's 'Red Pepper' magazine

From top-down to bottom-up

Early and Wainwright both focused upon examples of grassroots organisation by activists, as opposed to top-down 'diktat' from union and party leaderships. Early started by describing the typical format of union political activity in the USA. He said the unions tend to organise separate lobbying events at government offices, one day and one group of workers at a time. Public union mobilisation in the USA is "*very scripted*", with a prescribed set of 'talking points' to keep lay members on message, he said. There is an attitude of deference to elected Democrat officials.



However, in 2012, the state of Wisconsin witnessed an example of bottom-up union mobilisation when activists "*had a lobby day and didn't leave*". Public sector activists went to a local government hearing, staying awake to keep it in session. They opened up the windows of the

State House, so that more occupiers got in, people who had gone on an unofficial strike. Despite Republican attempts to turn private sector workers against the public sector workers, the private sector witnessed an inspiring turn out. Ultimately, the Wisconsin uprising

displayed a very different model for the USA, with community mobilisation and mass rallies of over 100,000 people.

Wisconsin was not a top-down union initiative orchestrated from Washington but a spontaneous bottom-up activity, to which union leaders then rushed to become part. This spirit of bottom-up activity was mirrored in the Occupy movement. As Early noted, whereas many union lay members and officials had been “*bound for years by Robert’s Points of Order*” (rules for running meetings) those who became involved in Occupy took risks within the more democratic decision-making processes they found there. In New York, an Occupy Labor group composed of union activists involved in the movement continues to meet, long after the eventual collapse of the camp itself.

Hilary Wainwright also illustrated an emerging politics-from-below – its challenges as well as its potential. She recounted an experience of a sustained and successful union and community campaign against privatisation imposed by a Labour Council in the North East of England. Faced with 'their' party – the party originally created by the unions – being the instrument of privatisation, the unions in Newcastle created their own politics, “*making the path as they walked*”, and self-consciously learned from experiences across the world. They developed their own alternative for publicly-driven public service reform, drawing on the knowledge of their members and users of local services. They built a strong independent political campaign around the theme 'Our City is Not for Sale'.



She had also just witnessed first-hand the creation of a new kind of politics in Greece, including a new kind of engagement with state institutions, with the rise of Syriza (see Section []). What was crucial in Greece as in England was the “*insistence on creating alternatives in the here and now, in practice*” and the development of “*a politics*

rooted in grassroots struggles, autonomous from political institutions – even while engaging with them”, she said.

According to Wainwright, this politics-from-below in Newcastle was possible because of people’s belief in the public service ethic, in the need to care for society’s young and old, and for efficient and effective government structures to enable this. Union members saw themselves as members of a community; in that sense they responded to privatisation politically, not only in terms of defending their jobs and conditions. The union leadership understood the role of union organisation as being to help this commitment to public service cohere as a source of creativity and collective self-confidence. This meant fostering a politics “*produced from below*”, rather than delegating politics to others through union and Labour Party hierarchies. It meant an emphasis instead on the “*role of the unions and citizens directly trying to transform the state, turning it from an instrument of control to a resource for social change*”.

The linking of struggles

For Wainwright, this is a new politics, which is not a matter of ‘announcing parties’, or reproducing the old and often hierarchical forms taken by some of the Left. Rather, it is a form of politics in which different struggles and initiatives learn how to take from and give to one another. “*As the old taken-for-granted politics fail to deliver, people are open to all kinds of inspiration and direct inter-connection, local, national and international*”, she said.

For example, the union branch that she spent time with in Newcastle Council was inspired by struggles taking place in Seattle (USA) against the World Trade Organisation in the late 1990s to believe that – contrary to Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher’s mantra - there *are* alternatives. They then became involved in the World Social Forum and were influenced by ideas of participatory democracy, for example in Porto Alegre (Brazil). The trade union movement should make more resources available to enable activists to learn directly from others’ experiences, to “*import wider struggles locally*”, she said.

Early also noted the degree to which union activists involved in social movements such as Occupy gained inspiration and organisational prowess from these interactions. The Wisconsin upsurge and the Zucotti Park (New York) Occupy movement had a big impact on union lay members, who were empowered to develop their own more militant and creative ways to confront corporate power and employers. Early visited Occupy camps all over the USA, experiencing first-hand the cross-fertilisation and fraternisation of groups formerly ‘walled off’ from one another.

The Wisconsin uprising was ultimately a failure in its attempt to halt the local government legislation, and the protests did not lead to the general strike that some hoped for. For Early, the lesson is that *“if we are going to fight to defend what we have gained in the past we are going to need allies”*. This does not mean placing faith in politicians and lawyers, but forging links with other movements and struggles.

Pat Horn’s work with StreetNet International has seen traditional trade unions brought into close cooperation with social movements through alliances with organisations of street vendors in the global South. From hostile beginnings, the unions have developed strategic responses to these wider struggles.

StreetNet developed a ‘World Class Cities for All’ (WCCA) campaign for the 2008 African Cup of Nations in Ghana and the 2010 World Cup in South Africa. In this, street vendors, trade unions and social movements demanded that authorities consult with them on developments which would impact on their homes and livelihoods. This campaign linked up with the ‘Decent Work for Decent Life’ campaign of the Building Workers International (BWI), see also Section []. Even today, the street vendors and construction workers still speak of themselves as partners, and march alongside one another.

Horn attributes this success to the specific alliance-building approach adopted by StreetNet, based on a transparently working class analysis. StreetNet has been accepted by the trade unions because of

the class analysis it offers, and because it is a member-based organisation, not an NGO. Meanwhile, it is trusted by the organisations of street vendors and shack dwellers because of its actions in their interests. During the WCCA campaign, StreetNet deliberately built a working class alliance, rather than one, say, for the small business sector to shore up its position in the face of the corporate offensive of the friends of FIFA President Sepp Blatter.

The examples from Horn show the power of an explicitly class-based programme. Early contrasted this with some union initiatives in the USA, including a campaign by the Communication Workers of America to ‘defend the middle class’. They failed to articulate a coherent class position, and have been ‘trumped’ by the Occupy movement’s notion of the ‘99%’. Rather than “*focus group, pollster driven formulations*”, the idea of the 99% versus the 1% “*really clarified things*”. The problem is, he said, that the labour movement too often refrains from using terms such as ‘capitalism’ and does not self-identify as “*a movement speaking on behalf of the working-class majority*”.

From ‘everyday solidarity’ to ‘political power’

For all the positive steps taken by the labour movement in uniting with other struggles, how are we to ‘institutionalise’ this solidarity and resistance into real and effective forms of power capable of bringing about true change?

Wainwright noted that “*dominant power structures depend on us for their reproduction*”. That dependence of the ruling institutions on us, she argued, gives us “*sources of power to resist and transform*”. The labour activists from around the world at this Summer School are “*a very important group in terms of their capacities*”, she noted, but this capacity is wasted if it is used just to reproduce top-down forms of labour organisation that limit the possibilities of transformation. However, the capacities of global trade unionism can also be overwhelmingly positive. This positivity mostly exists ‘under the radar’ in the kind of alternatives developed as part of resistance to cuts, privatisation, environmental destruction, and precarious work

and through to all kinds of everyday activities and deeds of cooperation and solidarity. Examples include the 'solidarity food' movement that she'd just heard is organised around allotments and other co-operative food production in the nearby city of Sheffield, to social centres in Italy, to solidarity health clinics run by nurses and doctors in Greece, and the solidarity economy in Brazil... the list would be infinite. Wainwright raised the question of how all these scattered examples of alternative social dynamics can become institutionalised or at least interconnected as more lasting, more macro, sources of political power.

For instance, the forms of community action forged during the Miners' Strike in the UK in the 1980s were significant, but did not leave any legacy of lasting institutional form. This is largely the story of transformative movements in Britain, where trade unions have tended to hand political, social issues over to the Labour Party. It has led to many good things, such as the Welfare State but the political impetus from the trade unions has been weakened by the Labour Party's monopoly hold on working class politics. While cautious about generalising the European experience, Wainwright suggested that we are now witnessing the exhaustion of those old mediated, hierarchical institutions. The Labour Party in the UK, Pasok in Greece, and the Italian Communist Party (PCI) are all institutions intimately linked to or founded by trade unions, but one-by-one they have been discredited or self-destroyed.

Facing the limits of the Labour Party as an efficient vehicle for working class politics today, British unions such as Unite are no longer spending so much of their energies as in the past on putting resolutions to Labour Party conferences, or asking Ed Miliband (the Labour leader) to do this or that. Unite is concentrating its energies into "*building new institutions*", for example community branches and the new 'think-and-do-tank' Class (Centre for Labour and Social Studies) recently launched by the trade unions in the UK.

Given how new movements come and go, it is a key challenge to build on and spread examples like these and the many other innovative organisation-building experiences being discussed at this

School. So how do we build “*institutions that can withstand defeat, that are both lasting and creative?*” asked Wainwright.

Much has been made of the ‘network’ as a new model of organisation. However, “*networks need infrastructures*” and “*engineers to maintain them*” – people who make sure there is plenty of preparation for the next meeting, who make sure information is well and widely communicated, who are thinking all the time about reaching out, grasping new opportunities, who notice when people have dropped out and find out why in case it reveals organisational weakness to pay attention to. Wainwright used the metaphor of a jazz group, where the band provides a basic structure and rhythmical backbone that enables improvisation. In the same way, networks must be fluid and creative, based upon the autonomy of the individual or particular group in relationship to others. Out of this autonomy springs unity. A balance must be struck between leadership and facilitation. Feminist movements have traditionally provided an example of where such a mix has been employed to good effect, she said.

Labor Notes: <http://labornotes.org>

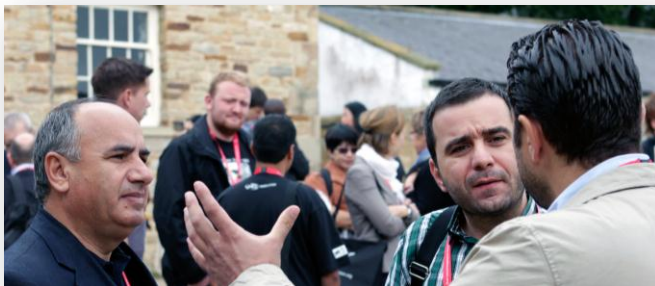
StreetNet International: www.streetnet.org.za

Transnational Institute: www.tni.org

Red Pepper: www.redpepper.org.uk

Class (Centre for Labour and Social Studies):

<http://classonline.org.uk/>



Emergency Exit

"Susan George hit the nail on the head when she said that, although we know we are on the side of the angels, we don't defend our ideals and fight the battle of ideas. And yet we have such a depth of knowledge and experience in our movement that we need to more fully exploit."

Bert Schouwenburg, GMB, UK

What Do We Do with the Global Corporations?

Susan George is a famous activist, author and President of the Board of the Transnational Institute (TNI), a 'worldwide fellowship of scholar activists'. She is also a member of the GLI Advisory Board. She began her lively presentation by stating that *"Capitalism is in trouble. But not enough trouble yet!"*



Neoliberal capitalism has become dominant since the 1980s, and that has meant in particular the privatisation of public services around the world. Most natural resources have become commodities. Since 2008, when world food prices went through the roof, land grabs have been snatching tens of millions of hectares

from their traditional tillers and putting them to corporate use, for export. Water is seen as the perfect capitalist product - it is indispensable, there is no substitute for it, and the market for it can only grow as the world population increases. Newly invented categories of services such as "ecosystem protection and restoration" are another new frontier. Their aim is to legitimise the 'market' as the solution for all our environmental ills.

As the transnational corporate system spreads into ever-expanding territory, the dilemma of regulation is posed ever more sharply. Any system requires rules and in the richer countries, industrial corporations are slightly better regulated - this is one reason why they move to poorer ones.

Financial corporations in particular have been extremely skilful in wiping out public oversight. The corporate system is dangerous because it is so interlinked and so concentrated. Recent research shows that the top 50 (hugely interconnected) transnational corporations (TNCs) are all giant financial corporations, banks, funds or insurance companies - with the sole exceptions of Walmart and the Chinese Petro-Chemical Corporation. If the economy is going well, the system appears robust. But an accident in any one of these top fifty TNCs could quickly become a shattering crisis for everyone and would make the fall of Lehman Brothers look trivial. This is the truth we must keep repeating: we are living on a knife-edge.

“Who can do what to get these beasts under control, if, indeed, it is possible at all?” she asked. Take the case of a community or a union faced with destruction, social and/or ecological, brought about by a TNC. The ideal way to act would be legal - to have binding international laws that could be used against them. But we don’t have the means for that yet. So second best to take on the TNCs is: first, to build a solid coalition of interests on the ground, and second, to identify and link with similar groups in the place where the company is headquartered, almost invariably in the North. If the case against the company is made with sufficiently powerful and persuasive research, and if the Northern headquarters support groups are kept informed and asked for their specific inputs, we can make life very uncomfortable for a corporation from a public relations viewpoint. Don’t forget, for example, the local churches’ capacity to link South to North and vice-versa. National or international boycotts can sometimes work, though they need long and careful preparation to be successful.

This means that we must learn to work together, often with people we don’t know and this can’t just be done over the Internet. Debate

and discussion are necessary for people to realise that at bottom, trade unionists, farmers, ecologists, women, students, academics, retired people and so on have the same needs and share the same interests. One needn't agree on everything to do some things together. In fact, it's the only way to win.

So, George asked, what could we do that hasn't yet been tried and would still be viable? Her answer is that we could use the financial crisis to solve both the crisis of inequality and the environmental crisis.

- We could socialise the banks that have received public money and then oblige them to lend to small and medium enterprises with an ecological or a social project and to families wanting to make their houses energy neutral. The socialised banks should have representatives of their personnel and their customers on the Board, not just the government.
- We could have an international financial transaction tax (FTT) which would bring in huge revenues to redress our social systems and finance the great green transition.
- We could have Eurobonds and a European Central Bank that lends to States at low interest.
- We could get tough on tax havens used by companies and wealthy individuals to avoid paying their share of taxes, and take away the charters of banks and companies that use them. Companies can and do now pay zero or very low tax for years on end.

Corporate propaganda has convinced many workers that regulation and a green transition are so-called job-killers. This isn't true. Green investment would be a huge source of jobs. We had a lot more jobs available before neo-liberalism took over, invested massively in the purely financial economy, and got rid of regulation. The corporate sector would be very happy to get rid of permanent labour contracts, regulations on hiring and firing, collective bargaining, retirement benefits and many other gains of working people.

In closing, George argued that getting control over the TNCs ultimately means getting control over the financial system -

downsizing the banks, taxing international capital, closing tax havens, and putting some resilience into our system which has never been as fragile as it is today. *"This is an immense task. It may be impossible. I don't know"*. Then she added, *"I do know that if working people and their unions do not make coalitions with all the other groups - the social movements, the environmentalists, the small farmers, the retired people, the students and everyone else who is suffering from our present system - we don't have a chance"*. Unions are important and they should not abandon their day-to-day union tasks and struggles which are their primary mission. But unions are too vital to remain only in their own domain. They also have to be prepared to join, and if possible initiate, working alliances with other groups to explore and build their actions on this common ground.

If the convergence of unions and other social movements takes off in a big way, it has the capacity to create what physicists call a 'phase change', as when water becomes ice or steam. *"I hope you will all want to contribute to this phase change in history which is full of promise if we rise to the challenge"*. As the German poet Holderlin said, *"Where grows the greatest danger grows also that which saves"*.

Discussion Points

Susan George's presentation gave rise to several questions and comments from the participants. One, from South Africa, commended George for her analysis of the commodification of Nature. Climate justice has become a major social movement in Africa, as land grabs and the use of plantations to generate carbon credits are increasing. This is sheer neo-colonialism! He emphasised that *"plantations are not forest"* and that carbon credits exist really to allow Northern companies to continue polluting.

Another participant felt that a Financial Transaction Tax seems to be an inadequate response today, in the face of the huge financial crisis. In fact, banks have been *de facto* nationalised, but public property does not automatically translate into public control over the banks.

We should campaign for the socialisation of banks: for turning banks into ‘public utilities’, he said.

Another crucial issue is that of the privatisation of pension funds. The financialisation of pensions is a key factor in the global financial crisis, and so we should be fighting for public pensions.

Finally a unionist from the UK wondered how we could communicate these very complex issues to our members and the lay public. In fact, even Members of Parliament are not really aware of the content of such things as international trade agreements!

On this last point, Susan George drew attention to the strategy that the Right has used since at least the 1970s. Realising it necessary to win the ‘battle of ideas’, it has invested financial and intellectual resources into think-tanks, universities, etc. Winning back the intellectual hegemony is also an important task for the Left, which needs to be sustained over a long period of time, she said.

S. Vitali, J.B. Glattfelder, and S. Battiston, **‘The Network of Global Corporate Control’**, 2011:

www.plosone.org/article/info%3Adoi%2F10.1371%2Fjournal.pone.0025995



Public Services – Public Ownership

This session was led by **David Hall**, Director of the Public Services International Research Unit (PSIRU). The PSIRU supports the global union federation for public sector workers, the Public Services International (PSI), with research and data. He is also Principal Lecturer in the International Business and Economics Department at Greenwich University, London.



It started with some debate about whether services deliver better to the public if they are publicly- or privately-run, with participants giving examples from their own countries. In truth, David Hall said, research shows no direct correlation between who runs the service and the standard of that service. But we need to be clear about what we mean by ‘efficiency’ or ‘effectiveness’. They are not the same thing, and we must ask who benefits the most. Do we rate services ‘successfully delivered’ according to their contribution towards overall ‘economic development’, or rather by the extent to which they improve the quality of life for the majority of the people? Do we factor, for example, environmental sustainability into our idea of what is an ‘efficient’ service?

Access to food, water, and health are universal human rights, as Peter Rossman of the IUF pointed out. They are essential to human life and it is not the mission of the private sector to provide them. ‘Efficiency’ is here not an appropriate concept. *“It is not like the production of cars or i-pads”*, he said. Social democrats, with their promotion of Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs), did not get this right. PPPs were born in the UK, and are now spreading globally, spurred on by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and its quest to reduce public expenditure.

The group discussed how selective the private sector is about which services it will take on. In much of Africa, private companies are not interested in running the electricity supply because most people are too poor to pay. Meanwhile, in wealthy but mountainous

Switzerland, private companies could never make the profits they demand to run railways and postal services and so these have to be publicly subsidised. David Hall said it is also important to look at the structure of financing in PPPs. As with other corporations (see Section []), many global ‘public service providers’ are dominated by their financial operations and are demanding extremely high returns for their shareholders – even as high as 70%.

Private companies can claim ‘efficiency’ for those services which they do run because they choose to operate only the easier ones. What is more, the real cost to governments of enabling the private sector to operate public services is never factored in – of regulating them and of the tendering process, of fixing things or bailing out when they go wrong, etc.

‘Quality Public Services’

So how are we in the trade union movement to tackle this situation? Unions fight hard to win recognition in the private ‘service providers’ but, after they have won, they often drop the issue. When unions do run ‘anti-privatisation’ campaigns, however, they do not get much support from the public. Many people now seem to accept the idea that privately-run services are ‘efficient’ and publicly-run ones ‘inefficient’. There is a stigma attached to the term ‘public’. Even public sector workers are held in a poor light. In the UK, there is quite a lot of contempt for public sector workers, and their unions. When they try to defend their pension schemes, they are accused of self-interest. Meanwhile, they are often demoralised because it is so hard to deliver a good service.

Governments say, “We are living beyond our means. Austerity is necessary”, and many people believe them. The IMF is using the demographic crisis, that too many people are now “living too long”, as a rationale for cutting public expenditure on healthcare and pensions. Again, too many people accept this argument.

Unions are caught defending what is a mess, after cut after cut. Where is the strong defence from union leaders of the public sector

and its constructive role in society? We seem to have lost the argument about the ‘public good’.

And yet the tide is turning. The ‘Anti-Cuts’ and ‘Occupy’ movements show that many people are angry at austerity programmes and want a better, more equal society. More people are seeing the failures of privatisation. The unions need to tap into this much better, but with a more sophisticated strategy than simply ‘anti-privatisation’.

As David Hall explained, the PSI is promoting the concept of ‘Quality Public Services’ - meaning that, even where services are privatised, they should still be run in the public interest. The PSI encourages its affiliated unions not just to defend their own members but promote improvements in services for the whole community. This means strengthening union alliances with the wider community, and focussing on what is effective for the majority. Brazil is now discussing the right of Nestle to advertise unhealthy food, for example.

There was general agreement that we need much greater efforts by unions at all levels, including at the national and global levels, to counter the arguments that have dominated the past few decades, and develop better strategies. We need to document the myths and realities about private sector investment and its ‘efficiency’.

- It is not true that the private sector necessarily brings “more investment” into public services. PPPs often have to be bailed out by governments, just like the banks have been. This is what is behind the austerity. We have to give a clear response when governments say ‘We are broke and you are the problem’.
- There is no incompatibility between economic growth and public spending, as Wagner’s Law (named after the 19th century German economist Adolph Wagner) shows. On the contrary, public spending has been rising for over one hundred years, along with growth. Half of all jobs in the world are created out of public spending.

- Some services – such as police, fire, road transport, and electricity - need a very high level of infrastructure which can never be developed by the private sector.
- Unions need to be much more proactive on social care that needs delivering. We are not ‘living too long’ – elderly people are a public good, not a liability. Public sector unions should be at the forefront of developing a better strategy for elderly care, which is a growing sector, and a good strategy will gain public support.
- We must strongly counter the negativity in which public sector workers and their unions are held. Public sector workers are making a huge contribution towards society, and should be celebrated for it.
- We need much more public, democratic control over our services and how they are run, whether they are PPPs or are publicly-run. There are examples to illustrate the case. For example, in Kerala, India, there is devolution of finance and decision-making to village level councils, who are trained and hold regular public meetings to discuss what services they want and how they want them delivered. It is a workable system.
- Unions need to know much more about the private companies that claim to be ‘service providers’. As one participant noted, in some sectors such as construction, unions act as ‘inspectors’ and this could be better developed in other sectors too.
- There is a growing demand for public ownership and control, sometimes with concerned citizens running effective campaigns. In Germany, for example, there is a new wave of municipalisation in the energy sector, partly driven by demands from the ‘green’ movement, but also the private sector had failed to get sufficient profitability and wanted to sell up, i.e. a combination of factors leading in the same direction. Unions need to grasp such opportunities much better.

“Quality public services are the foundation of democratic societies and successful economies. They ensure that everyone has equal access to vital services, including health care, education, electricity, clean water and sanitation. When these services are privatised, maximizing corporate profits replaces the public interest as the driving force. Privatisation is a dangerous trend that must be reversed.”(PSI)

Public Services International (PSI): www.world-psi.org

Public Services International Research Unit (PSIRU) researches the privatisation and restructuring of public services around the world, with special focus on water, energy, waste management, and healthcare. It produces reports and maintains an extensive on-line and accessible database on the multinational companies involved: www.psiru.org

‘Why we need public spending’, by David Hall, PSIRU, October 2010: www.psiru.org/reports/2010-10-QPS-pubspend.pdf

Quality Public Services – Action Now! www.qpsactionnow.org/

Organising in Transnational Corporations

Two delegates from the Building & Woodworkers' International (BWI), one from Africa and one from Eastern Europe, spoke about BWI campaigns in their regions to organise construction workers, though working for very different types of corporate employers.

Organising Chinese construction companies in Africa



Justina Jonas is from Namibia. In 1990 it finally became independent from South African apartheid rule, and her country is now regarded as a middle income country, even though it has one of the highest inequalities between rich and poor in the world, she said.

China has been involved in the birth and growth of independent Namibia. It provided arms and financial assistance during the struggle for independence, and has given over US\$1 billion in aid to Namibia since then.

Between 2005 and 2007, Chinese construction companies began to significantly penetrate the Namibian economy. Much of the supply chains supporting these companies were subcontracted to other Chinese companies too, creating a foreign network of both private and state-owned enterprises in the country. Today, there are around 16 Chinese construction companies in Namibia, of which 9 are state-owned enterprises.

By 2007, Chinese workers employed by the Chinese construction companies started to question the conditions of their employment. Many did not have proper employment contracts. There was endemic non-compliance with labour laws and national minimum wages for the construction sector. Poor working and living conditions and a lack of safety equipment were commonplace, and unfair dismissals were on the increase. Sick and maternity leave were not paid, despite the companies employing a particularly young workforce. There was also suspected widespread corruption in the tendering process.

Despite these grievances and a lack of transparency about Chinese investment and subcontracting, the Namibian Government was reluctant to confront the Chinese companies.

The global union federation for construction workers, BWI, embarked on a strategy to organise the workers in these companies, both African and Chinese. It began by recruiting young branch organisers, establishing strong stewards' committees and giving them training. It mobilised militant industrial activity at construction sites, and also targeted the Chinese workers for recruitment and organising.

The next stage of the campaign moved towards publicity and increased support. The President was lobbied to intervene in the situation, and awareness was raised amongst the public and the media.

The campaign faced some serious problems. There was division between the Chinese and African workers because of language barriers, and a lack of unity over industrial action. They were also being monitored by the State.

However, the campaign was successful in a number of areas. After the BWI contacted the President, the Minister of Labour summoned all the Chinese companies for talks. A 'Social Dialogue' was formed in 2010 and remains on-going. Some companies are now paying annual sick and maternity leave. And the campaign still enjoys support from the public and the media.

African Governments are generally not willing to attach conditions to Chinese investment. They want the infrastructural investment which the Chinese bring. So, it is up to the trade unions to protect the workers from mistreatment by Chinese companies, and most major problems and cases of exploitation occur in non-unionised areas, Jonas said.

Later, a participant asked how the Namibian organisers were able to overcome the cultural and language barriers so as to get to speak to

the Chinese workers. Jonas replied that, indeed, the language barrier was the biggest challenge. Also, many Chinese workers who did communicate with the unions were quickly sent back to China. The Chinese authorities are strict on preventing Chinese workers from communicating with local people, particularly with trade unions.

Nevertheless, through patient engagement, plus secret meetings, the trade unions did successfully win the rights of Namibian workers for Chinese workers in Namibia.

The lack of transparency is crucial, she said. There were rumours of some Chinese workers being ex-criminals who had been exported to Africa. Without an honest dialogue, this exacerbated divisions between African and Chinese workers.

2012 European Football Championship: An example of global union campaigning

Vasyl Andreyev, a BWI delegate from the Ukraine, spoke about the campaign launched by the BWI there and in Poland in the build-up to the 2012 European Football Championship.

The BWI was finding that the construction industry involved in the 2012 Games was, for example, failing to pay wages properly. Also, many of those operating machinery on site were undocumented workers, and the poor working conditions were causing on-site deaths. The construction industry is one of the most dangerous in the world.

So, the campaign targeted contractors, workers, unions, state bodies and Governments, with the aim of getting decent work for all workers involved in the Games' construction projects. They focussed on getting:

- Dialogue on labour issues between unions, employers, governments, and the international football federation UEFA
- Tender agreements negotiated with governments
- Zero accidents at construction sites

- Legal employment, decent wages and social protection
- Maximum quality job creation and skills development programmes
- Negotiating better working conditions for construction workers
- Organising and recruitment of new members, particularly in Ukraine
- Raising of public awareness on labour rights at the Euro-2012 stadiums and other infrastructural projects
- Developing union networks and international solidarity

The BWI mounted a powerful PR campaign, using press conferences, parliamentary hearings, and the national and international media to draw attention to these issues. They gathered over 1 million signatures in Ukraine, giving the campaign real legitimacy.

A bilateral commission between the two countries was established, and joint conferences were held also with the global union ITUC and Qatari HRC.

Above all, the union was guaranteed free access to all construction sites by the Construction and Regional Development Ministry. And the union gained over 1670 new members, including 551 women.

Rejecting ‘Green Capitalism’: Unions and Climate Change



The Global Labor Institute based at Cornell University in New York (USA) has made environmental issues a key focus of its work. **Sean Sweeney** and **Lara Skinner** from there led a discussion on the environmental politics of global trade unionism, in particular responses to the fallacy of so-called ‘green capitalism’. Skinner drew on her work with the global

union federation for transport workers, the ITF, in developing trade union climate change policy.

There’s no denying it. Climate change is happening – extreme weather events are becoming more frequent, and eight billion tons of carbon dioxide have been emitted since 1945. In order to reduce the ‘parts per million’ of CO₂ in the atmosphere to 350ppm – a safe limit – we would need to become zero-carbon or carbon negative, requiring nothing short of a revolution in production and consumption.

However, there is a “*huge distance between scientific and political reality*” – the facts of climate change and what is being done. This is in part because of the embrace by major institutions of ‘green capitalism’ – the dominant idea that markets can solve the climate crisis, embodied in the international agreement called the Kyoto Protocol.

There is currently no discussion of the need for public ownership of industry to tackle climate change. Instead, the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) and the International Labour Organisation (ILO), for example, are maintaining the ‘green capitalist’ approach.

Yet “*green capitalism isn’t happening*”. While there is a green economy, on the grand scale it is ‘business as usual’. US\$0.5 trillion is needed a year to seriously begin to reduce carbon emissions – so far, we’re well off that.

Green capitalism’s doctrine of endless growth is not going to solve climate change; economic growth drives emissions growth. The world economy is five times bigger than in 1950. Nor does higher consumption lead to more or better jobs – the transport sector grows but unionisation among transport workers fails to keep up.

“We need to assert social growth over economic growth. To do this, we need a ‘democratic economy’”, to challenge who controls industry.

Trade Union Responses

In the early stages of debate in the 1990s, the trade union presence at major climate change conferences could be ‘counted on one hand’. When the ITUC did begin to engage, its aim was to get workers at the table of major agreements. However, today there is a growing recognition that inserting pro-worker words into international treaties isn’t going to solve these major problems.

Meanwhile, though, there are still very unhelpful positions taken by some major trade unions in the world, such as the US union confederation AFL-CIO’s support for the State Department’s rejection of a global binding agreement.

The ITF was one of the first GUFs to seriously engage with climate change, even though transport is one of the highest carbon emitting sectors, said Skinner. In 2009, a climate change working group was established in the ITF, with the GLI providing support. This led to ten ITF affiliates developing climate change and transport policies that year. These results helped to get a climate change policy adopted at the ITF’s 42nd Congress in Mexico the following year. Many affiliates now have radical positions on the issue, after recognising the current model of development and growth isn’t working for the

environment or for workers, that cheap transport is driving emissions up, and that green capitalism isn't working.

A New Climate Politics

For Josua Mata from the Philippines, the notion of 'climate jobs' responds to the need to link climate change with employment. Also the 'environmental' jobs that do exist need to be organised – many factories producing goods for the 'green economy' are currently non-unionised or anti-union.

An alternative position must be developed to 'green' capitalism's privatising agenda. The cautious approach of the major national federations affiliated to the ITUC was understandable in the 1990s, but now many unions are looking for a bolder approach that can tackle the systemic features of the crisis.

Global trade unionism urgently needs to engage with social movements in the fight against climate change, and it is beginning to do so. The 2009 Copenhagen climate demonstration featured shockingly little trade union presence, in a country with high union-density. However, the Rio+20 trade union assembly challenged the green capitalist position, and saw real debate which must be kept alive. Capital's message of 'green capitalism' is coherent; labour's is not – yet.

'Capitalism abuses workers and the environment in equal measure' – unions must make this link and develop a strongly ecological independent trade union position. Members in the global South are already feeling climate change's effects.

A democratic transition to a radically different global economy is needed, and trade unions have to be at the heart of it.

Political Education in Trade Unions – Time for a New Wave?

Introducing this session, Dave Spooner remarked that trade union political education must not simply consist of lectures on Lenin, or tips on how to door-knock effectively for labour parties. Rather, it *“must foster a critical political consciousness to better comprehend and challenge the contemporary world around us”*.

It was in this spirit that **Luciole Sauviat** of the Global Labour University Alumni Association outlined the contemporary role that trade unions can play in workers’ education. She began by defining ‘workers’ education’. For her, this is not only trade union education, but something that takes place among many groups, including, for example, religious organisations. What defines workers’ education is that it is for adults in their capacity as workers, and typically organised by workers’ organisations. It is generally participatory (learning collectively), respecting or beginning with the learners’ own experiences, and non-neutral politically. For her, it is important that workers learn how to use critique, and are encouraged to see that it is they who make society, or otherwise they might be susceptible to authoritarian ideologies/leaders.

There are many approaches to workers’ education. There is of course training on union organisation, on labour law for lay members or officials, how to bargain collectively, etc. Some others emphasise individual, self-development. Sadly, she said, there has been an increase in unions carrying out tuition on employability, including sessions on how to present one’s CV, how to sell oneself on the labour market, etc. There are even unions which do training to help increase productivity. In some places, it has become necessary to bypass those unions and organise workers’ education through other forms of association.

Sauviat accepts that the learning of new skills is important, but the development of political consciousness is, for her, most important of all. The different aims need not be opposed to one another. Indeed,

they are often connected. In bargaining training there will often be a small part committed to consciousness development. However, if one learns only bargaining, there is less time to concentrate on gaining the political consciousness needed to bring about change in society.

However, a change is taking place. Given the severity of what the labour movement worldwide is facing, trade unions have become a



lot more willing to support more radical models of workers' education. Sauviat would like to see an even stronger focus on political consciousness in workers' education. Formal educational institutions are too tied into reproducing the "*consciousness of the rulers*". So, in union education, the aim should be "*to break with this hegemonic consciousness*", by bringing theoretical ideas about the world together with a programme for putting those ideas into practice as trade unionists.

Sauviat identified three main 'blocks' on the development of political consciousness in trade union education:

- The stranglehold that unhelpful ideologies have both within the capitalist market system, and in trade unions themselves.

- The lack of money available for education at different levels of trade union organisation.
- The lack of relationships with movements and campaigns outside the immediate vicinity of the trade unions - in this case, the lack of a link between education and existing movements or campaigns.

Sauviat said the last point is particularly important, as *“learning occurs in many places”*. It is not only in formal education that workers can learn, but also by being part of new struggles that occur. Currently, *“there is an increase in struggles, and at times like these people want to learn more about the world”*. Linking up workers’ education with existing struggles can open up opportunities for workers to develop their political consciousness, as part of these struggles. Indeed, if they are not linked, an ideological vacuum can arise that can be taken advantage of by other social and political forces.

Sauviat ended on an optimistic note, suggesting that out of the turmoil of the global economic crisis might arise a renewed emphasis on the development of political consciousness among workers. *“Education can raise consciousness much more strongly, and have a much stronger impact, in times of change and in times of political turmoil”*, she concluded.

Discussion Groups

Two discussion groups looked at the kinds of workers’ education which they think leads to strong unions, with active members, fit for responding to today’s global challenges.

Education for ‘global class consciousness’?

In the discussion group chaired by Khalid Mahmood, participants started by sharing experiences of workers’ education in their own countries. A number remarked on a tendency to focus on improving skills, on building individual capabilities, or on a general knowledge

of labour law or the welfare system, but often with little political vision.

Vasco Pedrina from Switzerland, however, said that his union Unia recently resurrected an old but useful concept of a 'union school'. Here, they asked the members what kind of training they wanted. A programme was then built around their replies, accompanied by cultural activities – in this case, a festival of films on workers' rights. The first year of this experience was very positive, and now other unions in Switzerland are copying it.

The vexed issue of 'consciousness' soon emerged in the discussion. Some objected to the idea that trade unions should try to 'raise consciousness'. Rather, they argued, we have to learn from the workers, not try to impose a 'truth'.

Others, however, replied that, even if we do not yet have a political programme, we have a political tradition we can relate to, that of democratic socialism. Trade union political work should be based on its values and objectives. Dan Gallin argued that a general approach is possible to political education, which is not party political. The point of departure of such education has to be the class identity and the class interest. Then, of course, concrete issues arising from that situation should be discussed. We should make clear that democracy is essentially a class issue.

Participants agreed that general principles need to be put into national or regional contexts, which vary greatly. In some countries, a very long trade union tradition exists, but may well need to be revitalised. In more recently industrialised countries, by contrast, the first need is to build trade unions. Drawing from his country's recent political revolution, a colleague from Egypt, remarked that the independent trade union movement which will develop there will certainly differ from European trade unions. Even so, he argued, the question of class consciousness has to be reframed in terms of a 'global class consciousness'.

A colleague from India remarked that we should examine the relation of the trade unions to the political Left in our countries. For him, there is a disconnection between ‘global solidarity’ and trade union education. He believes that workers’ political education needs to be grounded in the specific, concrete situation in which they find themselves. For instance, he cannot discuss xenophobia in the abstract, but only in the context of relations between India and Pakistan.

A US-based labour educator stressed the fact that workers cannot devote as much time to political education as well-meaning educators would want them to. One has to strike a balance between an ambitious political education and the expectations of ordinary workers. If ‘customer satisfaction’ is not reached, then workers will not turn up at political education courses any more. This balance has also to be struck in the content of the courses.

The discussion then moved on to educational methods. What teaching and learning methods are appropriate for workers’ education?

The best methods for workers’ education are participatory, where people teach each other, rather than settings in which one educator unilaterally delivers lectures to a passive audience. Study Circles, which originated in the Northern countries, allow for the exchange of experiences. The transmission of experience is also a transmission of memory. So the teaching of history is essential. As one participant said, *“History is not about the past but about the future! History creates identity, and is thus essential for the future.”*

This point was taken up by a colleague from Germany who argued that political education should aim to reduce political confusion and hopelessness. It is really important to have alternatives up for discussion. Also, she said, *“Stories give people hope!”* In her view, we sometimes forget to write up the stories of our victories, to share them more widely.

Others argued that political education should also be about creating a shared identity, and shared values, among workers. A participant from India underlined the importance of linking history and consciousness. In the past, his union has tried to educate people on abstract topics, but this was a dead-end. Now they use, for instance, pieces of poetry as a vehicle. This is an example of an innovative type of education, which makes use of cultural constructs. It also allows the working class to re-appropriate culture for itself.

And what about the use of new technologies for workers' education? Obviously, many new means of communication can be used to store, develop and share teaching materials. New technologies can also be used to link workers across borders. Various online resources were mentioned, including the new Labor Film database which contains references to movies about workers and working conditions. Participants agreed that the GLI should use its website and Facebook account to disseminate the findings of the present conference and build a network of trade unionists across the world.

However, as a colleague from Switzerland warned, information technology is a means but cannot be the solution to trade union organisation. We should never forget the added value that we have as unions. We are a collective actor. Courses in trade union schools help to create a shared identity as workers. This collective dimension is a weapon against neoliberalism and we must use it!

Labor Film Database: <http://laborfilms.com>

From the technical to the political

In this discussion group chaired by Josua Mata from the Philippines, participants noted an increasing shift around the world towards political rather than technical education in the labour movement, reflecting the demands of members and activists.

In Britain, Unite has had a greater political focus in its education programme for the past ten years. In South Africa, the labour movement is now providing economic history courses alongside the

more traditional and technical forms of education. In the USA, the labour movement has established a Union Leadership Institute which covers leadership skills along with critical economic, political, and social questions. In Russia, self-funded trade union summer schools have been created, and have linked up with other movements such as 'Occupy' and various NGOs, providing seminars and classes covering issues such as feminism, art, politics and geopolitics.

Participants felt that traditional trade union ideology remains important to the members, and workers' education should meet this demand by adapting it to modern circumstances. There is a need for renewed ideological and theoretical approaches. However, many trade unions seem to lack theory-based work, good contact with academics, and sustained ideological discussions.

Education is key for those wanting to promote a more radical trade union agenda. If we are to move away from the 'social dialogue' ideological approach, this demands education about such issues as modes of production, the distribution of wealth, and how political developments are affecting workers. There must be a focus on organisation and campaigning methods, including the contribution that workers can make in the international trade union movement.

Others said that it is important to get the balance right between political and technical education. Too often the curriculum is top-down, and fails to address the 'bread and butter' concerns of workers. Education programmes should bridge the gap between the two, making it relevant for union members. Union education work depends on and should reflect the needs of the members. This means good quality, prior analysis of their needs. Also, because it is needs-based, the language used must be accessible.

Skills-based education can be very important for empowering precarious workers in the national and global economy. But, even when developing technical skills, political/ideological perspectives can help guide the discussion. One participant spoke about the kinds of education for domestic workers being pioneered by labour organisations in the global South, including improving technical

skills in, for example, cooking and sewing, as well as literacy and numeracy, alongside political education. Confidence-building is key for such workers, to help empower them as individuals as well as part of the wider labour movement too.

In another example, in its education programmes involving street vendors, StreetNet uses a feminist perspective to guide women towards alternative ways of addressing their situation. The history of the labour movement is in transforming society, and education programmes should not be compartmentalised. There was broad agreement that education should never be de-linked from campaigning and organisation-building.

Self-awareness and solidarity must be simultaneously nurtured to help workers defend their own, and their fellow workers', rights and interests. One participant gave the example of the growth of evangelical Christianity in the global South, which has been based on this idea of identity and community, and could be studied as model to learn from.

More commitment to education is needed. Many unions, like the employers they engage with, do not see education as a priority and even as a drain on the resources needed for organising. But education and organising are not mutually exclusive. Indeed, education is a crucial part of organising. Well-educated workers organise other workers and are more active in their community. Education builds the momentum of grassroots, bottom-up, radical trade unionism, and is perhaps the most effective long-term tool available to the international labour movement.

Branches are a good starting point for local union education, to meet the growing demand for grassroots education. For this, union officers need be taught how to empower rank-and-file members and workers. Training workers to become teachers for their co-workers is an efficient means of educating workers, and ensures that the education remains relevant to those particular workers and their issues.

Where there is a lack of resources for formal programmes, there can be more emphasis on informal approaches to education, both inside and outside the workplace. Self-education is an important tool too. The labour movement needs to devote resources to those who have little spare time or finance so as to educate themselves. Learning disabilities amongst some of the poorest and most exploited workers also need to be accommodated in education strategies.

Social media, networking and digital campaigns feature heavily in new grassroots labour movements, such as in Greece, and more traditional labour organisations could better use these tools too. Developing digital and online education services is needed if we are to compete with the digital resources available to international capitalism.

Consequences

The final session of the summer school was to explore what were to be the next steps for the participants and for GLI.

Like all labour education events, it had no right or mandate to determine national or international trade union policy. It was up to individual participants to reflect on what they had learned during the week, and report to their own organisations with ideas, policy questions and proposals for activities. Numerous ideas were put forward.

At the time of writing, some three months after the summer school, many of the ideas and intentions have been turned into reality. Many of the participants have become involved or more active in their respective Global Union Federations; many have presented reports and initiated discussions in national union executive committees or meetings; many have proposed new political education programmes.

Participants are now planning further GLI education events in their own countries and regions in Greece, Bulgaria, and Russia in 2013, and proposals are being discussed by participants from Turkey, Belgium, and a consortium of organisations in Asia. There are also at least three proposals to establish new permanent GLIs to join the international GLI Network.

Most importantly, consultation with the supporting national and international trade union organisations revealed a unanimous opinion that the GLI International Summer School should become a regular annual event. Resources permitting, the second GLI International Summer School will be held on **8-12 July 2013**, at Northern College.

Dave Spooner, November 2012.

The Summer School Commission

The GLI asked a group of about 20 of the younger and less experienced trade unionists at the Summer School to form a ‘Commission’, to reflect on the presentations and discussions, and then prepare six proposals for the global trade union movement.

The Commission presented its report to all the summer school participants. While not a set of conclusions for the school as a whole, it served well as good ‘snapshot’ of some of the key issues as perceived by young activists.

Summer School Commission Report

1. **Political education** – campaigns based on building capacity of workers at the grassroots for activism.
 - A flexible political education system based on national contexts
2. **Protection of precarious workers** – transformation of unions from organisations into movements involving precarious workers.
 - Unions should organise precarious workers. Precarious work is a ‘growing threat’ to the survival of trade unions.
 - Unions must modify their constitutions to recognise, organise and support precarious workers
 - Best practise should be shared among sectors and unions in formalising the informal economy. Proposal for creation of a programme to raise awareness within unions and to organise these workers.

- Currently precarious/informal workers' unions are far too small – larger unions must support small groups aimed at organising precarious/informal workers. Unions aren't charity but do have money and expertise.
- GLI can help provide a platform for these developments where these issues can be discussed

3. Understanding the diversity of labour laws around the world

- Work to break down transnational barriers to coordinate global strike action
- A feasibility study to analyse labour laws globally
- Bringing up lowest global labour standards to internationally recognised levels

4. To ensure and increase GUF inclusivity

- GUFs need to change their interpretation of collective bargaining framework agreements and social dialogue towards more inclusivity and democratic structures
- Affiliation fees should respect circumstances of the unions or the wealth of the nations themselves – possibly linked to GDP.
- GUFs need to be more inclusive in order to better reflect and respond to the views and needs of workers, independently from governmental, corporate and geographical influence.

5. To increase and ensure peer-to-peer rank and file contact

- To utilise organisations such as the Global Labour Institute, Union Solidarity International and others which use multi-platform social media for dynamic solidarity, breaking down cost and distance barriers
- To strive to physically engage in each others' struggles, efficiently utilising union resources through direct solidarity action – possibility of international solidarity brigades
- Information sharing about struggles in each country and region in order to raise awareness and send solidarity

6. A global fight against fascism, the far-right, and authoritarianism

- GUFs must also work with international radical movements opposing neoliberalism, particularly in the global South

Participants

Kamal Abbas, Center for Trade Union & Workers' Services, Egypt
Kolya Abramsky , UK
Bernard Adjei, Building & Woodworkers International, Ghana
Hasan, Aktas, Building & Woodworkers International, Turkey
Vasyl Andreyev, Building & Woodworkers International, Ukraine
Burcu Ayan, International Union of Foodworkers, Turkey
Claire Baker, Unite the Union , UK
Umberto Bandiera, Unia, Switzerland
Nihal Banna, Center for Trade Union & Workers' Services, Egypt
John Bell, Northern College, UK
Mike Bird, Women in Informal Employment Globalizing & Organizing
Daniel Blackburn, International Council for Trade Union Rights, UK
Kirill Buketov, International Union of Foodworkers, Russia
Sandy Cijntje, Building & Woodworkers International, Curacao
Plamen Dimitrov, Confederation of Independent Trade Unions (KNSB), Bulgaria
Ozgur Doruk, Building & Woodworkers International, Turkey
Anne Dufresne, Fonds National de la Recherche Scientifique, Belgium
Kathryn Dyer, Public & Commercial Services Union, UK
Steve Early, Labor Notes, USA
Jeff Edwards, Unite the Union , UK
Ben Egan, National Union of Teachers, UK
Ahmed El Genedy, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Egypt
Rachel English, Women Working Worldwide, UK
Keith Ewing, King's College, London, UK
Romain Felli, Global Labour Institute, Switzerland
Dan Gallin, Global Labour Institute, Switzerland
Susan George, Transnational Institute, Netherlands
Andy Gilchrist, National Union of Rail Maritime and Transport Workers, UK
Fábio Godoy, International Metalworkers Federation , Brazil
Sam Goldsmith, National Union of Rail Maritime and Transport Workers, UK
Priscilla Gonzalez, National Domestic Workers Alliance, USA
Karoly Gyorgy, National Confederation of Trade Unions (MSZOSZ), Hungary
David Hall, Public Services International Research Unit, UK
Peter Hall-Jones, New Unionism Network, New Zealand
Nimi Hoffman, , South Africa

Joe Holly, Global Labour Institute, UK
 Annie Hopley, Global Labour Institute, UK
 Lucy Hopley, Global Labour Institute, UK
 Patricia Horn, StreetNet International , South Africa
 Justina Jonas, Building & Woodworkers International, Namibia
 Mahf Khan, Unite the Union , UK
 Blessing Karumbidza, Co-operatives & Rural Enterprise Support Initiative, South Africa
 Peter Kilbane, Northern College, UK
 Lefteris Kretsos, University of Greenwich, Greece
 Joelle Kuntz, Global Labour Institute, Switzerland
 Jin Sook Lee, Building & Woodworkers International, Switzerland
 Khalid Mahmood, Labour Education Foundation, Pakistan
 Miguel Martinez Lucio, Manchester Business School, UK
 Josua Mata, Alliance of Progressive Labor , Philippines
 Celia Mather, Global Labour Institute, UK
 Josiah Mortimer, Global Labour Institute, UK
 Jim Mowatt, Unite the Union , UK
 Katja Mueller, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Germany
 Gisela Neunhoeffer, Communication Workers of America, Germany
 Ann Ørjebu, Industri Energi, Norway
 Ron Oswald, International Union of Foodworkers, Switzerland
 Walton Pantland, Union Solidarity International , UK
 Karin Pape, Global Labour Institute, Switzerland
 Jayesh Patel, National Union of Rail Maritime and Transport Workers, UK
 Vasco Pedrina, UNIA, Switzerland
 Krastyo Petkov, Confederation of Independent Trade Unions (KNSB), Bulgaria
 Harry Pitts, Global Labour Institute, UK
 George Pope, Northern College, UK
 Ajay Rai, International Transportworkers Federation , Nepal
 Peter Rossman, International Union of Foodworkers, Switzerland
 Ashim Roy, New Trade Union Initiative, India
 Luciole Sauviat, Global Labour University Alumni Association, Germany
 Mary Sayer, Unite the Union , UK
 Sean Sayer, Global Labour Institute, UK
 Corinne Scharer, UNIA, Switzerland
 Bert Schouwenburg, GMB union, UK
 Philip Seamons, Unite the Union , UK

Lara Skinner, Global Labor Institute, USA
Dave Spooner, Global Labour Institute, UK
Guy Standing, Bath University, UK
Sean Sweeney, Global Labor Institute, USA
Jeanette Syversen, Industri Energi, Norway
Elizabeth Tang, Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions, Hong Kong
Shalini Trivedi, Building & Woodworkers International, India
An Joong Un, Building & Woodworkers International, Korea
Hilary Wainwright, Transnational Institute , UK
Scot Walker, Unite the Union , UK
Steve Walker, The Open University, UK
Sara Woolley, Bakers, Food & Allied Workers Union, UK

What they said about the 2012 GLI Summer School

"A wonderful week ... bringing together the right people to envision and start to plan a stronger, transformative global labor movement." Priscilla Gonzalez, Domestic Workers United, USA.

"Company, comradeship and inspiration. Solidarity for ever!" Scot Walker, Unite, UK.

"An Amazing week! I have found it a brilliant tool, has really opened my eyes and given me a wider perspective on unions around the world and I think this is invaluable to all shop stewards!" Sarah Woolley, Bakers, Food & Allied Workers, UK.



"I left the richer for attending. May all your contribution to the rights of workers and the masses of the working class people across the world bear fruit". Blessing Karumbidza, South Africa.

"I am so thankful for the opportunity I had to meet so many people and be part of a group that is going to make the difference". Sandy Cijntje, Building & Woodworkers International, Curacao.

"Rich and inspiring discussions". Krastyo Petkov, Confederation of Independent Trade Unions, Bulgaria.

"One of the best union events I have ever been to". Walton Pantland, Union Solidarity International, UK

"An enormous and very successful engagement for our first international Summer School...."Ce n'est qu'un début, continuons le combat!". Vasco Pedrina, Unia, Switzerland.

"A fantastic event ... it's just a pity that we can't send all our people on courses like this! ... Susan George hit the nail on the head when she said

that although we know we are on the side of the angels, we don't defend our ideals and fight the battle of ideas. And yet we have such a depth of knowledge and experience in our movement that we need to more fully exploit". Bert Schouwenburg, GMB, UK

"The selection of speakers and discussion generated were absolutely fantastic. The range of countries/ industrial relations systems represented was extremely impressive and particularly the way that discussion groups led out of plenary presentations". Ben Egan, National Union of Teachers, UK.

"Great school – one of the best I've ever participated in! Let's create two, three, more GLI summer programs!!" Steve Early, Labor Notes, USA.

"The Summer School was a breakthrough to some of us in many areas. It was great to meet well experienced comrades at the international level. As discussed, we will for sure plough back on what we learned to make differences on the life of the working class on the world. I believe that the labour movement has much to offer than any movement in the world and only if we do our work with no fear, we will assist many workers and make their working environment a safe place." Justina Jonas, Building & Woodworkers International (BWI), Namibia



"A well organised and comprehensive program, which - for someone like me coming from the Middle East - was very informative about trade unions from the other side of the world. There was also the chance to get to know many comrades from different trade unions and relevant institutions from Europe and other parts around the globe. This will certainly contribute positively to creating a network among all participants, and perhaps assist in building solidarity among unionists - which has become an urgent need especially now, as independent trade unions in developing countries are facing tremendous obstacles and constraints". Ahmed El-Genedy, Friedrich Ebert Foundation, Egypt office

"I am so thankful for the opportunity I had to meet so many people and be part of a group that is going to make the difference." Sandy Cijntje, Building & Woodworkers International (BWI), Curaçao

The Political Agenda of the International Trade Union Movement

In July 2012, eighty-four trade unionists from twenty-six countries gathered at Northern College in northern England to debate and discuss the politics of the international trade union movement. This is a report of those discussions.

Contributors and presenters included: **Kamal Abbas**, Centre for Trade Union & Workers' Services (CTUWS), Egypt; UK; **Plamen Dimitrov**, Confederation of Independent Trade Unions in Bulgaria (KNSB); **Steve Early**, labour journalist, USA; **Keith Ewing**, King's College London, UK; **Dan Gallin**, Global Labour Institute, Switzerland; **Susan George**, Transnational Institute, Netherlands; **Priscilla Gonzalez**, National Domestic Workers' Alliance, USA; **Károly György**, National Confederation of Hungarian Trade Unions (MSZOSZ); **David Hall**, Public Services International Research Institute; **Peter Hall-Jones**, New Unionism, New Zealand; **Patricia Horn**, StreetNet International; **Lefteris Kretsos**, University of Greenwich, UK; **Khalid Mahmood**, Labour Education Foundation, Pakistan; **Josua Mata**, APL, Philippines; **Jim Mowatt**, Unite the Union, UK; **Ron Oswald**, International Union of Foodworkers; **Vasco Pedrina**, Unia, Switzerland; **Krastyo Petkov**, Bulgaria; **Peter Rossman**, International Union of Foodworkers (IUF); **Ashim Roy**, New Trade Union Initiative, India; **Luciole Sauviat**, Global Labour University Alumni Association, France; **Dave Spooner**, Global Labour Institute, UK; **Guy Standing**, University of Bath, UK; **Sean Sweeney**, Global Labor Institute, USA; **Elizabeth Tang**, HKCTU China Labour Rights Committee; **Hilary Wainwright**, Transnational Institute, UK.

"We have the opportunity now. The body politics is changing before our eyes. The rich are getting richer, the poor poorer. It is different now from several decades ago. Then we were preparing for less work. Now people are being made to work harder than ever. So we need to foment ideas, to change the contours of trade unionism.

We need to up our game. We need to be the accusers of capitalism. Now we need to swing the pendulum in our favour, to make our voices heard. We work to live, not live to work. We are human beings first and foremost. We need to assert that urgently – and the only way to do that is through trade unions.

Look at your heritage, but think of the future. Dream of things that never were, and ask why not? How can we make them happen?"

Jim Mowatt, Director of Education, Unite the Union, UK
Welcoming address to 2012 GLI International Summer School